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Chicago, Illinois



MAMMOTH  
MYSTERY BOOK

# B O O K S B Y



ANGEL ESQUIRE  
ANGEL OF TERROR  
THE BLACK  
THE BLACK ABBOT  
BLUE HAND  
CAPTAINS OF SOULS  
THE CLEVER ONE  
THE CLUE OF THE NEW PIN  
THE CLUE OF THE TWISTED  
CANDLE  
THE CRIMSON CIRCLE  
THE DAFFODIL MURDER  
THE DARK EYES OF LONDON  
DIANA OF KARA-KARA  
THE DOOR WITH SEVEN  
LOCKS  
THE FACE IN THE NIGHT  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE  
FROG  
THE FLYING SQUAD  
THE FOUR JUST MEN  
THE FOURTH PLAGUE  
THE GIRL FROM SCOTLAND  
YARD  
THE GREEN ARCHER  
THE GREEN RIBBON  
GREEN RUST  
GUNMAN'S BLUFF  
THE HAIRY ARM

THE INDIA-RUBBER MEN  
JACK O'JUDGMENT  
KATE PLUS 10  
A KING BY NIGHT  
THE MAN WHO KNEW  
THE MELODY OF DEATH  
THE MISSING MILLIONS  
MR. COMMISSIONER SANDERS  
THE MURDER BOOK OF MR.  
J. G. REEDER  
THE NOTHING TRAMP  
RED ACES  
THE RINGER  
THE RINGER RETURNS  
THE SILVER KEY  
SANDERS OF THE RIVER  
THE SECRET HOUSE  
THE SINISTER MAN  
THE SQUEALER  
THE STRANGE COUNTESS  
TAM O' THE SCOOT  
THE TERRIBLE PEOPLE  
THE THREE JUST MEN  
TERROR KEEP  
THE TRAITORS' GATE  
THE TWISTER  
THE VALLEY OF GHOSTS  
WHITE FACE

# Mammoth Mystery Book

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Three Complete Novels  
by ...  
Edgar Wallace



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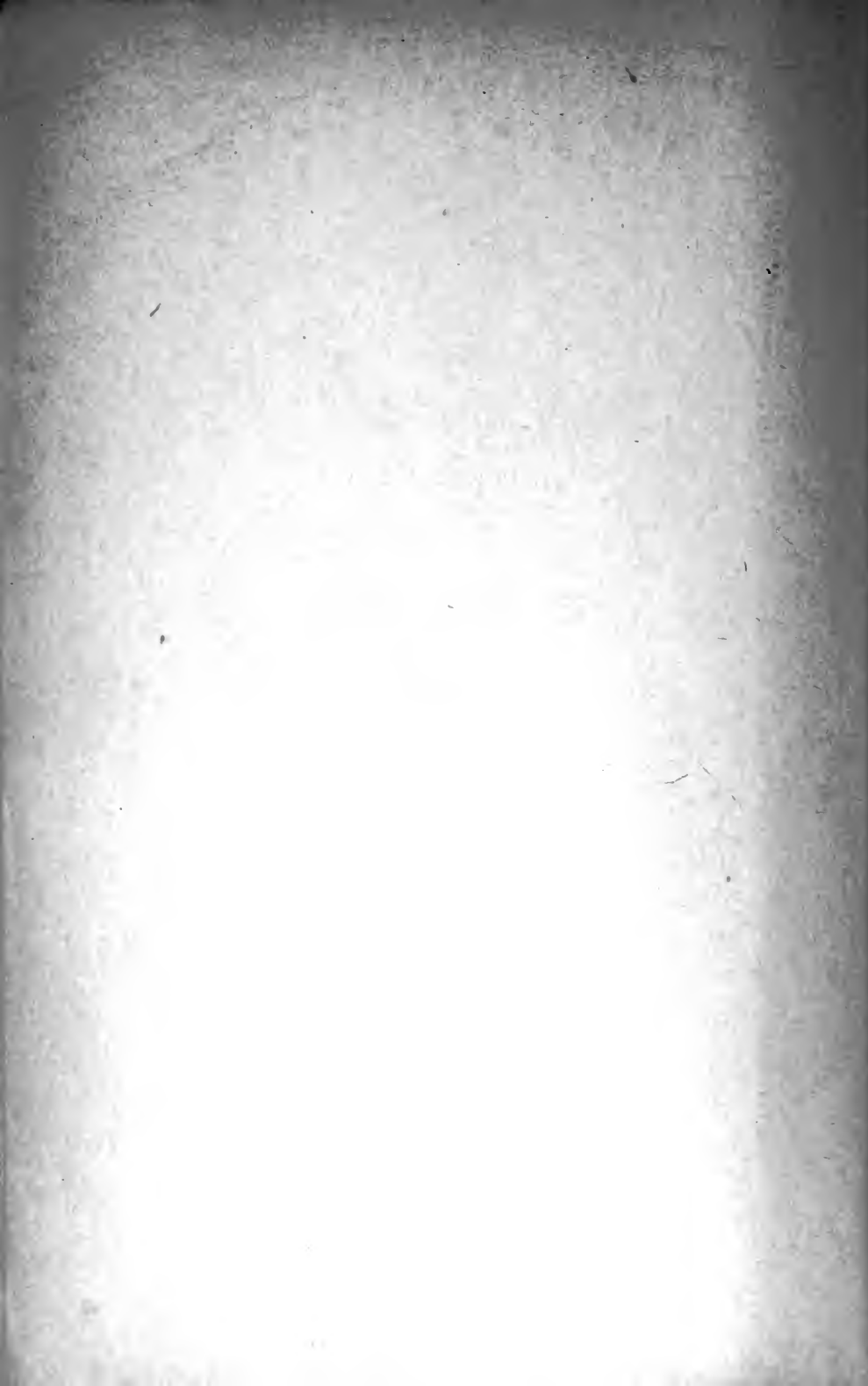
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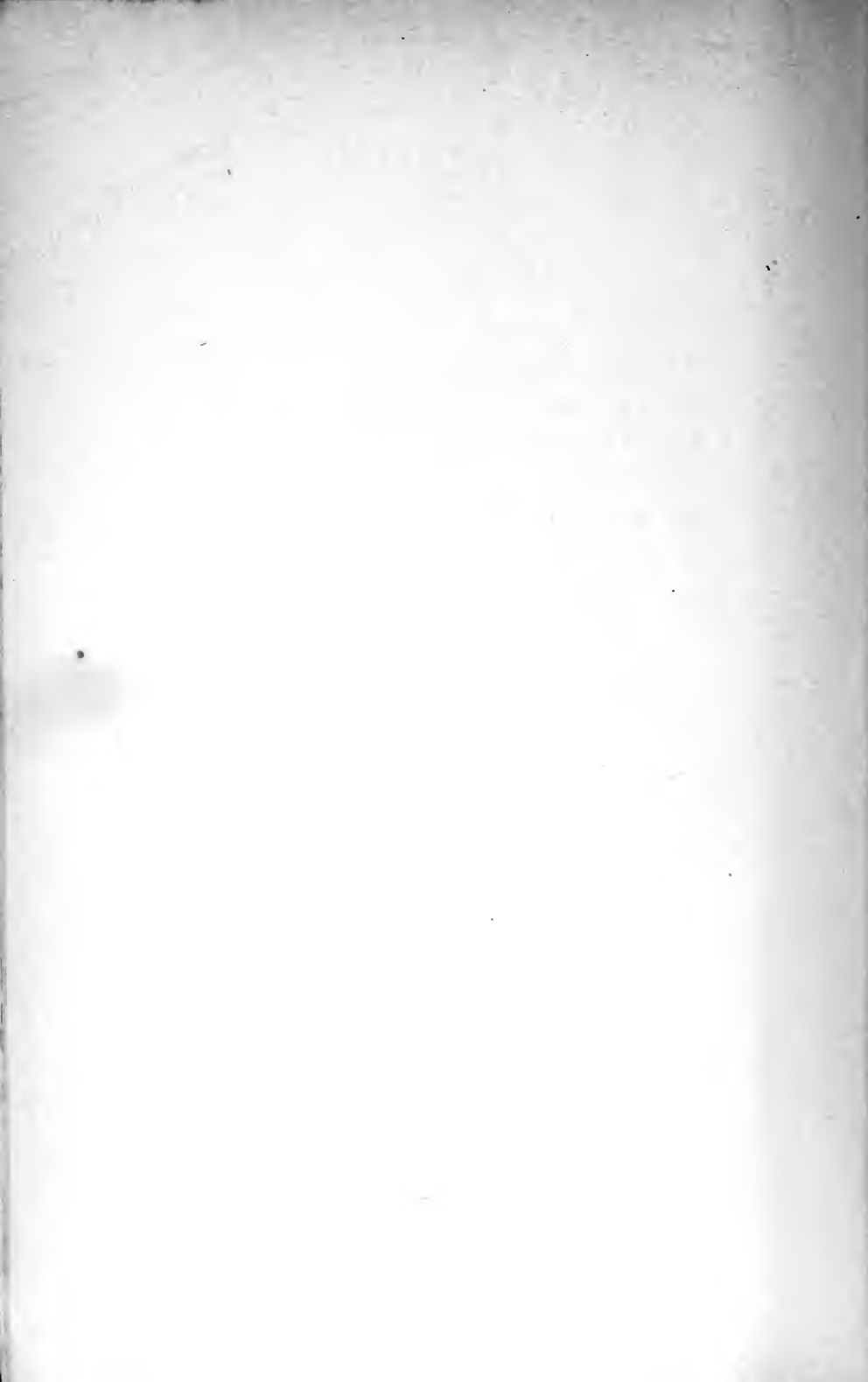


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## THE HAIRY ARM



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# THE HAIRY ARM

## CHAPTER I

### THE HEAD-HUNTER

To say that he was uninterested in crime, that burglars were less thrilling than golf scores, and the record of murders hardly worth the reading, might convey a wrong impression of Captain Mike Brixan to those who knew him as the cleverest agent in the Foreign Office Intelligence Department.

His official life was spent in meeting queer Continentals in obscure restaurants and in divers rôles to learn of the undercurrents that were drifting the barks of diplomacy to unsuspected ports. He had twice roamed through Europe in the guise of an open-mouthed tourist; had canoed a thousand miles or so through the gorges of the Danube to discover in little riverside beer houses secret mobilizations, odd tasks, but to his liking.

Therefore he was not unnaturally annoyed when he was withdrawn from Berlin at a mo-

ment when, as it seemed, the mystery of the Slovak treaty was in a way to being solved, for he had secured, at a cost, a rough and accurate draft.

"I should have had a photograph of the actual document if you had left me another twenty-four hours," he reproached his chief, Major George Staines, when he reported himself at Whitehall next morning.

"Sorry," replied that unrepentant man, "but the truth is, we've had a heart-to-heart talk with the Slovakian prime minister, and he has promised to behave, and he has practically given us the text of the treaty. It was only a commercial affair. Mike, did you know Elmer?"

The foreign office detective sat down on the edge of the table.

"Have you brought me from Berlin to ask me that?" he demanded bitterly. "Have you taken me from my favorite café on Unter den Linden—by the way, the Germans are making small-arm ammunition by the million at a converted pencil factory in Bavaria—to discuss Elmer? He's a clerk, isn't he?"

Major Staines nodded.

"He *was*," he said, "in the accountancy department. He disappeared from view three

weeks ago, and an examination of his books showed that he had been systematically stealing funds which were under his control."

Mike Brixan made a little face.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said. "He seems to be a fairly quiet and inoffensive man. But surely you don't want me to go after him? That is a job for Scotland Yard."

"I don't want you to go after him," said Staines slowly, "because—well, he has been found."

There was something very significant and sinister in his tone, and before he could take the little slip of paper from the portfolio on the desk, Michael Brixan knew what was coming.

"Not The Head-hunter?" he gasped. Even Michael knew about The Head-hunter.

Staines nodded. "Here's the note." He handed the typewritten slip across to his subordinate, and Michael read:

You will find a box in the hedge by the railway arch at Esher.

THE HEAD-HUNTER.

That was all.

"The Head-hunter!" repeated Michael mechanically and whistled.

"We found the box, and, of course, we found

the unfortunate Elmer's head sliced neatly from his body," said Staines. "This is the twelfth head in seven years," Staines went on, "and in almost every case—in fact, in every case except two—the victim has been a fugitive from justice. Even if the treaty question had not been settled, Mike, I should have brought you back."

"But this is a police job," said the young man, troubled.

"Technically you're a policeman," interrupted his chief, "and the Foreign Secretary wishes you to take this case in hand, and he does this with the full approval of the Secretary of State, who, of course, controls Scotland Yard. So far the death of Francis Elmer and the discovery of his gruesome remains have not been given out to the press. There was such a fuss last time that the police want to keep this quiet. They have had an inquest—I guess the jury was packed, but it would be high treason to say so—and the usual verdict has been returned. The only information I can give you is that Elmer was seen by his niece a week ago in Chichester. We discovered this before the man's fate was known. The girl, Adele Leamington, is working for the Knebworth Film Corporation, which has its studio in Chichester. Old Knebworth is an



American and a very good sort. The girl is a sort of super—chorus—extra, that's the word."

Michael gasped and looked at him uncertainly.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Go along and see her," said the chief. "Here is the address."

"Is there a Mrs. Elmer?" asked Michael, as he put the slip into his pocket.

The other nodded.

"Yes, but she can throw no light upon the murder. She, by the way, is the only person who knows he is dead. She had not seen her husband for a month, and apparently they had been more or less separated for years. She benefits considerably by his death, for he was well insured in her favor."

Michael read again the gruesome note from The Head-hunter. "What is your theory about this?" he asked curiously.

"The general idea is that he is a lunatic who feels called upon to mete out punishment to defaulters. But the two exceptions disturb that theory pretty considerably."

Staines lay back in his chair, a puzzled frown on his face.

"Take the case of Willitt. His head was

found on Clapham Common two years ago. Willitt was a well-off man, the soul of honesty, well liked, and he had a very big balance at his bank. Crewling, the second exception, who was one of the first of The Hunter's victims, was also above suspicion, though in his case there is no doubt he was mentally unbalanced a few weeks before his death.

"The typewritten notification has invariably been typed out on the same machine. In every case you have the half-obliterated 'u,' the faint 'g,' and the extraordinary alignment which the experts are unanimous in ascribing to a very old and out-of-date Kost machine. Find the man who uses that typewriter, and you have probably found the murderer. But it is very unlikely that he will ever be found that way, for the police have published photographs pointing out the peculiarities of type, and I should imagine that Mr. Hunter does not use this machine except to announce the demise of his victims."

Michael Brixan went back to his flat, a little more puzzled and a little more worried by his unusual commission. He moved and had his being in the world of high politics. The finesses of diplomacy were his peculiar study, and the normal abnormalities of humanity, the thefts

and murders and larcenies which occupied the attention of the constabulary, did not come into his purview.

"Bill," said he, addressing the small terrier that lay on the hearthrug before the fireless grate of his sitting room, "this is where I fall down. But whether I do or not, I'm going to meet an extra—ain't that grand?"

Bill wagged his tail agreeably. Whatever else might go wrong, Bill's comprehension was reliable.

## CHAPTER II

### MR. SAMPSON LONGVALE CALLS

WHEN most of the people had left the studio, and it was almost empty, Adele Leamington came to where the white-haired man sat crouched in his canvas chair, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, a malignant scowl on his forehead. It was not a propitious moment to approach him; nobody knew that better than she.

"Mr. Knebworth, can I speak to you?"

He looked up slowly. Ordinarily he would have risen, for this middle-aged American in normal moments was the soul of courtesy. But just at that moment his respect for womanhood was something below zero. His look was blank, though the director in him instinctively approved her values. She was pretty, with regular features, a mop of brown hair in which the sunshine of childhood still lingered. Her mouth firm, delicately shaped, her figure slim—perfect in many ways.

Jack Knebworth had seen many beautiful extras in his career. They were dolls without

intelligence or initiative—just extras who could wear clothes in a crowd, who could smile and dance mechanically, fit for extras and nothing else all the days of their lives.

"Well?" he asked brusquely.

"Is there a part I could play in this production, Mr. Knebworth?" she asked.

"Aren't you playing a part, Miss—can't remember your name—Leamington, is it?"

"I'm certainly playing. I'm one of the figures in the background," she smiled. "I don't want a big part, but I'm sure I could do better than I have done."

"I'm mighty sure you couldn't do worse than some people," he growled. "No, there's no part for you, friend. There'll be no story to shoot unless things alter."

She was going away, when he recalled her.

"Left a good home, I guess?" he said. "Thought picture making meant a million dollars a year an' a new automobile every Thursday? Or maybe you were holding down a good job as a stenographer and got it under your hat that you'd make Hollywood feel small if you got your chance? Go back home, kid, and tell the old man that a typewriter's got a sunlight arc beaten to death as an instrument of commerce."

The girl smiled faintly.

"I didn't come into pictures because I was stage-struck, if that is what you mean, Mr. Knebworth. I came in knowing just how hard a life it might be. I have no parents."

He looked at her curiously.

"How do you live?" he asked. "There's no money in extra work—not on this lot anyway. Might be if I was one of those billion-dollar directors who did pictures with chariot races. But I don't. My ideal picture has five characters."

"I have a little income from my mother, and I write," said the girl.

She stopped, as she saw him looking past her to the studio entrance, and, turning her head, she saw a remarkable figure standing in the doorway. At first she thought it was an actor who had made up for a film test.

The newcomer was an old man, but his great height and erect carriage would not have conveyed that impression at a distance. The tight-fitting tail coat, the trousers strapped to his boots, the high collar and black satin stock belonged to a past age, though they were newly made. The white linen bands that showed at his wrists were goffered, his double-breasted

waistcoat of gray velvet was fastened by golden buttons. He might have stepped from a family portrait of one of those dandies of the fifties. He held a tall hat in one gloved hand, a hat with a curly brim, and in the other a gold-topped walking stick. The face was deeply lined, was benevolent and kind, and he seemed unconscious of his complete baldness.

Jack Knebworth was out of his chair in a second and walked toward the stranger.

"Why, Mr. Longvale, I am glad to see you. Did you get my letter? I can't tell you how much obliged I am to you for the loan of your house."

Sampson Longvale of the Dower House! She remembered now. He was known in Chichester as "the old-fashioned gentleman," and once, when she was out on location, somebody had pointed out the big rambling house, with its weed-grown garden and crumbling walls, where he lived.

"I thought I would come over and see you," said the big man.

His voice was rich and beautifully modulated. She did not remember having heard a voice quite as sweet, and she looked at the eccentric figure with a new interest.

"I can only hope that the house and grounds are suitable to your requirements. I am afraid they are in sad disorder, but I cannot afford to keep the estate in the same condition as my grandfather did."

"Just what I want, Mr. Longvale, I was afraid you might be offended when I told you——"

The old gentleman interrupted him with a soft laugh.

"No, no, I wasn't offended—I was amused. You needed a haunted house; I could even supply that quality, though I will not promise you that my family ghost will walk. The Dower House has been haunted for hundreds of years. A former occupant in a fit of frenzy murdered his daughter there, and the unhappy lady is supposed to walk. I have never seen her, though many years ago one of my servants did. Fortunately I am relieved of that form of annoyance; I no longer keep servants in the house," he smiled, "though, if you care to stay the night, I shall be honored to entertain five or six of your company."

Knebworth heaved a sigh of relief. He had made diligent inquiries and found that it was almost impossible to secure lodgings in the



neighborhood, and he was most anxious to take night pictures, and for one scene he particularly desired the peculiar light value which he could only obtain in the early hours of the morning.

"I'm afraid that would give you a lot of trouble, Mr. Longvale," he said. "And here and now I think we might discuss that delicate subject of——"

The old man stopped him with a gesture.

"If you are going to speak of money, please don't," he said firmly. "I am interested in moving pictures—in fact, I am interested in most modern things. We old men are usually prone to decry modernity, but I find my chief pleasure in the study of those scientific wonders which this new age has revealed to us."

He looked at the director quizzically.

"Some day you shall take a picture of me in the one rôle in which I think I should have no peer—a picture of me in the rôle of my illustrious ancestor."

The old man gestured magnificently.

Jack Knebworth stared, half amused, half startled. It was no unusual experience to find people who wished to see themselves on the screen, but he never expected that little piece of vanity from Mr. Sampson Longvale.

"I should be glad," he said formally. "Your people were pretty well known, I guess?"

Mr. Longvale sighed.

"It is my regret that I do not come from the direct line that included Charles Henry, the most historic member of my family. He was my great-uncle. I come from the Bordeaux branch of Longvales, which has made history, sir." He shook his head regretfully.

"Are you French, Mr. Longvale?" asked Jack.

Apparently the old man did not hear him. He was staring into space. Then, with a start:

"Yes, yes, we were French. My great-grandfather married an English lady whom he met in peculiar circumstances. We came to England in the days of the directorate."

Then for the first time he seemed aware of Adele's presence, and he bowed toward her.

"I think I must go," he said, taking a huge gold watch from his fob pocket.

The girl watched them, as they passed out of the hall, and presently she saw the "old-fashioned gentleman" pass the window, driving the oldest-fashioned car she had ever seen. It must have been one of the first motor cars ever introduced into the country, a great, upstanding,

cumbersome machine, that passed with a thunderous sound and at no great speed down the gravel drive out of sight.

Presently Jack Knebworth came slowly back.

"This craze for being screened certainly gets 'em—old or young," he said. "Good night, Miss—forget your name—Leamington, isn't it? Good night."

She was halfway home before she realized that the conversation that she had plucked up such courage to initiate had ended unsatisfactorily for her, and she was as far away from her small part as ever.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NIECE

SHE occupied a small room in a small house, and there were moments when Adele Leamington wished it were smaller, that she might be justified in plucking up her courage to ask from the stout and unbending Mrs. Watson, her landlady, a reduction of rent. The extras on Jack Knebworth's lot were well paid, but infrequently employed, for Jack was one of those clever directors who specialized in domestic stories.

She was dressing when Mrs. Watson brought in her morning cup of tea.

"There's a young fellow been hanging round outside since I got up," said Mrs. Watson. "I saw him when I took in the milk. Very polite he was, but I told him you weren't awake."

"Did he want to see me?" asked the astonished girl.

"That's what he said," said Mrs. Watson grimly. "I asked him if he came from Knebworth, and he said no. If you want to see him, you can have the use of the parlor, though I

don't like young men calling on young girls. I've never let theatrical lodgings before, and you can't be too careful. I've always had a name for respectability, and I want to keep it."

Adele smiled.

"I cannot imagine anything more respectable than an early-morning caller, Mrs. Watson," she said.

She went downstairs and opened the door. The young man was standing on the sidewalk with his back to her, but at the sound of the opening door he turned. He was good-looking and well dressed, and his smile was quick and appealing.

"I hope your landlady did not bother to wake you up? I could have waited. You are Miss Adele Leamington, aren't you?"

She nodded.

"Will you come in, please?" she asked and took him into the stuffy little front parlor. Closing the door behind her she waited.

"I am a reporter," he said untruthfully, and her face fell.

"You've come about Uncle Francis? Is anything really wrong? They sent a detective to see me a week ago. Have they found him?"

"No, they haven't found him," he said care-

fully. "You knew him very well, of course, Miss Leamington?"

She shook her head.

"No, I have only seen him twice in my life. My dear father and he quarreled before I was born, and I only saw him once after Daddy died, and once before Mother was taken with her fatal illness."

She heard him sigh and sensed his relief, though why he should be relieved that her uncle was almost a stranger to her, she could not fathom.

"You saw him at Chichester, though?" he asked.

"Yes, I saw him. I was on my way to Goodwood Park—a whole party of us in a char-à-banc—and I saw him for a moment walking along the sidewalk. He looked desperately ill and worried. He was just coming out of a stationer's shop when I saw him; he had a newspaper under his arm and a letter in his hand."

"Where was the store?" he asked.

She gave him the address, and he jotted it down.

"You didn't see him again?"

She shook her head.

"Is anything really very badly wrong?" she

asked, anxiously. "I've often heard Mother say that Uncle Francis was very extravagant, and a little unscrupulous. Has he been in trouble?"

"Yes," admitted Michael, "he has been in trouble, but nothing that you need worry about. You're a great film actress, aren't you?"

In spite of her anxiety she laughed.

"The only chance I have of being a great film actress is for you to say so in your paper."

"My what?" he asked, momentarily puzzled. "Oh, yes, my newspaper of course!"

"I don't believe you're a reporter at all," she said with sudden suspicion.

"Indeed I am," he said glibly, and he dared to pronounce the name of that widely circulated sheet upon which the sun seldom sets.

"Though I'm not a great actress and fear I never shall be, I like to believe it is because I've never had a chance. I've a horrible suspicion that Mr. Knebworth knows instinctively that I am no good."

Mike Brixan had found a new interest in the case, an interest which, he was honest enough to confess to himself, was not dissociated from the niece of Francis Elmer. He had never met anybody quite so pretty and quite so unsophisticated and natural.

"You're going to the studio, I suppose?"

She nodded.

"I wonder if Mr. Knebworth would mind my calling to see you?"

She hesitated.

"Mr. Knebworth doesn't like callers."

"Then maybe I'll call on him," said Michael, nodding. "It doesn't matter whom I call on, does it?"

"It certainly doesn't matter to me," said the girl coldly.

"In the vulgar language of the masses," thought Mike, as he strode down the street, "she handed me a raspberry."

His inquiries did not occupy very much of his time. He found the little news shop, and the proprietor, by good fortune, remembered the coming of Mr. Francis Elmer.

"He came for a letter, though it wasn't addressed to Elmer," said the shopkeeper. "A lot of people have their letters addressed here. I make a little extra money that way."

"Did he buy a newspaper?"

"No, sir, he did not buy a newspaper; he had one under his arm—the *Morning Telegram*. I remember that, because I noticed that he'd put a blue pencil mark round one of the 'agony'



advertisements on the front page, and I was wondering what it was all about. I kept a copy of that day's *Morning Telegram*. I've got it now."

He went into the little parlor at the back of the shop and returned with a dingy newspaper which he laid on the counter.

"There are six there, but I don't know which one it was."

Michael examined the agony advertisements. There was one frantic message from a mother to her son, asking him to return, and saying that "all would be forgiven." There was a cryptogram message which he had not time to decipher. A third was obviously the notice of an appointment. The fourth was a thinly veiled advertisement for a new hair waver, and at the fifth he stopped. It ran:

Troubled. Final directions at address I gave you.  
Courage. BENEFACITOR.

"Some benefactor!" exclaimed Mike Brixan. "What was he like—the man who called? Was he worried?"

"Yes, sir; he looked upset—all distracted. He seemed like a chap who'd lost his head."

"That seems a fair description," said Mike.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LEADING LADY

IN the studio of the Knebworth Film Corporation the company had been waiting in its street clothes for the greater part of an hour. Jack Knebworth sat in his conventional attitude, huddled up in his canvas chair, fingering his long chin and glaring from time to time at the clock above the studio manager's office.

It was eleven when Stella Mendoza flounced in, bringing with her the fragrance of wood violets and a small, unhappy Peke.

"Do you work on your own time?" asked Knebworth slowly. "Or, perhaps, you thought the call was for afternoon. You've kept fifty people waiting, Stella."

"I can't help their troubles," she said with a shrug of shoulder. "You told me you were going on location, and naturally I didn't expect there would be any hurry. I had to pack my things."

"Naturally you didn't think there was any hurry!"

Jack Knebworth reckoned to have three fights a year. This was the third. The first had been

with Stella, and the second had been with Stella, and the third was certainly going to be with Stella.

"I wanted you to be here at ten. I've had these boys and girls waiting since a quarter to ten."

"What do you want to shoot?" she asked with an impatient jerk of her head.

"You mostly," said Jack slowly. "Get into number nine outfit and don't forget to leave your pearl earrings off. You're supposed to be a half-starved chorus girl. We're shooting at Griff Towers, and I told the gentleman who gave us the use of the house that I'd be through the day work by three. If you were a celebrated star you'd be worth waiting for; but Stella Mendoza has got to be on this lot by ten—and don't forget it!"

Old Jack Knebworth got up from his canvas chair and began to put on his coat with ominous deliberation, the flushed and angry girl watching him, her dark eyes blazing with injured pride and hurt vanity.

Stella had once been plain Maggie Stubbs, the daughter of a Midland grocer, and old Jack had talked to her as if she were still Maggie Stubbs and not the great film star of coruscating bril-

liance, idol—or her press agent lied—of the screen fans of all the world.

"All right, if you want a fuss you can have it, Knebworth. I'm going to quit—now! I think I know what is due my position. That part's got to be rewritten to give me a chance of putting my personality over. There's too much leading man in it, anyway. People don't pay real money to see men. You don't treat me fair, Knebworth. I'm temperamental, I admit it. You can't expect a woman of my type to be a block of wood."

"The only thing about you that's a block of wood is your head, Stella," grunted the producer, and he went on, oblivious to the rising fury expressed in the girl's face. "You've had two years playing small parts in Hollywood, and you've brought nothing back to England but a line of fresh talk, and you could have got that out of the Sunday supplements! Temperament! That's a word that means doctors' certificates, when a picture's half taken, and a long rest, unless your salary's put up fifty per cent. Thank goodness, this picture isn't a quarter taken or a eighth. Quit, you mean-spirited upstart—an quit as soon as you darn please!"

Boiling with rage, her lips quivering so that

she could not articulate, the girl turned and flung out of the studio.

White-haired Jack Knebworth glared round at the silent company.

"This is where the miracle happens," he said sardonically. "This is where the extra girl who's left a sick mother and a mortgage at home leaps to fame in a night. If you don't know that kind of thing happens on every lot in Hollywood, you're no student of fiction. Stand forth, Mary Pickford, the second!"

The extras smiled, some amused, some uncomfortable, but none spoke. Adele was frozen stiff, incapable of speech.

"Modesty don't belong to this industry," old Jack sneered amiably. "Who thinks she can play 'Roselle' in this piece—because an extra's going to play the part, believe me! I'm going to show this pseudo actress that there isn't an extra on this lot that couldn't play her head off. Somebody talked about playing a part yesterday—you!"

His forefinger pointed to Adele, and with a heart that beat tumultuously she went toward him.

"I had a camera test of you six months ago,"

said Jack suspiciously. "There was something wrong with her. What was it?"

He turned to his assistant. That young man scratched his head in an effort of memory.

"Ankles?" He hazarded a guess at random—a safe guess, for Knebworth had views about ankles.

"Nothing wrong with them. Get out the print and let us see it."

Ten minutes later Adele sat by the old man's side in the little projection room and saw her "test" run through.

"Hair!" said Knebworth triumphantly. "I knew there was something. Don't like bobbed hair. Makes a girl too pert and sophisticated. You've grown it?" he added, as the lights were switched on.

"Yes, Mr. Knebworth."

He looked at her in dispassionate admiration.

"You'll do," he said reluctantly. "See the wardrobe and get Miss Mendoza's costumes. There's one thing I'd like to tell you before you go," he said, stopping her. "You may be good, and you may be bad, but, good or bad, there's no use getting worked up over your future."

He snapped his finger.

"Give Miss What's-her-name the script,

Harry. Say, go out somewhere and study it, will you? Harry, you see the wardrobe. I give you half an hour to read that script!"

Like one in a dream, the girl walked out into the shady garden, that ran the length of the studio building, and sat down, trying to concentrate on the typewritten lines. It wasn't true—it could not be true! And then she heard the crunch of feet on gravel and looked up in alarm. It was the young man who had seen her that morning—Michael Brixan.

"Oh, please—you mustn't interrupt me!" she begged in agitation. "I've got a part—a big part to read."

Her distress was very real.

"I'm awfully sorry——" he began.

In her confusion she had dropped the loose sheets of the manuscript. Stooping with her to pick them up, Michael's head bumped hers.

"Sorry—that's an old comedy situation, isn't it?" he began.

And then he saw the sheet of paper in his hand and began to read. It was an elaborate description of a scene.

The cell is large, lighted by a swinging lamp. In center is a steel gate through which a soldier on guard is seen pacing to and fro——

"Good Lord!" said Michael and went white.

The "u's" in the type were blurred, the "g's" were indistinct. The page had been typed on the machine from which The Head-hunter sent forth his gruesome tales of death.



## CHAPTER V

### MR. LAWLEY FOSS

"WHAT is wrong?" asked Adele, seeing the young man's grave face.

"Where did this come from?"

He showed her the sheet of typewritten script.

"I don't know. It was with the other sheets. I knew, of course, that it didn't belong to 'Roselle'."

"Is that the play you're acting in?" he asked quickly. And then: "Who would know?"

"Mr. Knebworth."

"Where shall I find him?"

"You go through that door," she said, "and you will find him on the studio floor."

Without a word he walked quickly into the building. Instinctively he knew which of the party was the man he sought. Jack Knebworth looked up under lowering brows at the sight of the stranger, for he was a stickler for privacy in business hours; but, before he could demand an explanation, Michael was up to him.

"Are you Mr. Knebworth?"

Jack nodded.

"I surely am," he said.

"Can I speak to you for two minutes?"

"I can't speak to anybody for one minute," growled Jack. "Who are you, anyway, and who let you in?"

"I am a detective from the Foreign Office," said Michael, lowering his voice, and Jack's manner changed.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, as he accompanied the detective into his sanctum.

Mike laid down the sheet of paper with its typed characters on the table.

"Who wrote that?" he asked.

Jack Knebworth looked at the manuscript and shook his head.

"I've never seen it before. What is it all about?"

"You've never seen this manuscript at all?"

"No, I'll swear to that, but I dare say my scenario man will know all about it. I'll send for him."

He touched a bell, and to the clerk who came:

"Ask Mr. Lawley Foss to come quickly," he said.

"The reading of books, plots, and material for picture plays is entirely in the hands of my

scenario manager," he said. "I never see a manuscript until he considers it's worth producing; and even then, of course, the picture isn't always made. If the story happens to be a bad one, I don't see it at all. I'm not so sure that I haven't lost some good stories, because Foss"—he hesitated a second—"well, he and I don't see exactly eye to eye. Now, Mr. Brixan, what is the trouble?"

In a few words Michael explained the grave significance of the typewritten sheet.

"The Head-hunter!" Jack whistled.

There came a knock at the door, and Lawley Foss slipped into the room. He was a thinnish man, dark and saturnine of face, shifty of eye. His face was heavily lined, as though he suffered from some chronic disease. But the real disease which preyed on Lawley Foss was the bitterness of mind that comes to a man at war with the world. There had been a time in his early life when he thought that same world was at his feet. He had written two plays that had been produced and had run for a few nights. Thereafter he had trudged from theater to theater in vain, for the taint of failure was on him, and no manager would so much as open the brown-covered manuscripts he brought to them. Like many

another man, he had sought easy ways to wealth, but the Stock Exchange and the race track had impoverished him still further.

He glanced suspiciously at Michael, as he entered.

"I want to see you, Foss, about a sheet of script that's got among the 'Roselle' script," said Jack Knebworth. "May I tell Mr. Foss what you have told me?"

Michael hesitated for a second. Some cautioning voice warned him to keep the question of The Head-hunter a secret. Against his better judgment he nodded.

Lawley Foss listened with an expressionless face, while the old director explained the significance of the interpolated sheet; then he took the page from Jack Knebworth's hand and examined it. Not by a twitch of his face or a droop of his eyelid did he betray his thoughts.

"I get a lot of stuff in," he said, "and I can't immediately place this particular play; but if you'll let me take it to my office, I will look up my books."

Again Michael considered. He did not wish that piece of evidence to pass out of his hands; and yet, without confirmation and examination, it was fairly valueless. He reluctantly agreed.

"What do you make of that fellow?" asked Jack Knebworth when the door had closed upon the writer.

"I don't like him," said Michael bluntly. "In fact, my first impressions are distinctly unfavorable, though I am probably doing the poor gentleman a very great injustice."

Jack Knebworth sighed. Foss was one of his biggest troubles, sometimes bulking larger than the temperamental Mendoza.

"He certainly is a queer chap," he said, "though he's diabolically clever. I never knew a man who could take a plot and twist it as Lawley Foss can, but he's difficult."

"I should imagine so," said Michael dryly.

They passed out into the studio, and Michael sought the troubled girl to explain his abruptness. There were tears of vexation in her eyes when he approached her, for his startling disappearance with the page of the script had put all thoughts of the play from her mind.

"I am sorry," he said penitently. "I almost wish I hadn't come."

"And I quite wish it," she said, smiling in spite of herself. "What was the matter with that page you took? You *are* a detective, aren't you?"

"I admit it," Michael answered her recklessly.

"Did you speak the truth when you said that my uncle——" she stopped, at a loss for words.

"No, I did not," replied Michael quietly. "Your uncle is dead, Miss Leamington."

"Dead!" she gasped.

He nodded. "He was murdered under extraordinary circumstances."

Suddenly her face went white. "He wasn't the man whose head was found at Esher?"

"How did you know?" he asked sharply.

"It was in this morning's newspaper," she said.

Inwardly he cursed the sleuthhound of a reporter who had got on to the track of this latest tragedy. She had to know sooner or later; he satisfied himself with that thought. The return of Foss relieved him of further explanations. The man spoke for a while with Jack Knebworth in a low voice, and then the director beckoned Michael across.

"Foss can't trace this manuscript," he said, handing back the sheet. "It may have been a sample page sent in by a contributor, or it may have been a legacy from our predecessors. I took over a whole lot of manuscript with the

studio from a bankrupt production company."

He looked impatiently at his watch.

"Now, Mr. Brixan, if it's possible, I should be glad if you would excuse me. I've got some scenes to shoot ten miles away, with a leading lady from whose little head you've scared every idea that will be of the slightest value to me."

Michael acted upon an impulse.

"Would you mind my coming out with you to shoot—that means to photograph, doesn't it? I promise you I won't be in the way."

Old Jack nodded curtly, and ten minutes later Michael Brixan was sitting side by side with the girl in a char-à-banc which was carrying them to the location. That he should be riding with the artists at all was a tribute to his nerve rather than to his modesty.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MASTER OF GRIFF

For a long time Adele did not speak to him. Resentment that he should force his company upon her, and nervousness at the coming ordeal—a nervousness which became sheer panic as they drew nearer and nearer to their destination—made conversation impossible.

"I see your Mr. Lawley Foss is with us," said Michael, glancing over his shoulder, and by way of making conversation.

"He always goes on location," she said shortly. "A story has sometimes to be amended while it's being shot."

"Where are we going now?" he asked.

"Griff Towers first," she replied. She found it difficult to be uncivil to anybody. "It is a big place owned by Sir Gregory Penne."

"But I thought we were going to the Dower House?"

She looked at him with a little frown.

"Why did you ask if you knew?" she demanded, almost in a tone of asperity.

"Because I like to hear you speak," said the



young man calmly. "Sir Gregory Penne? I seem to know the name."

She did not answer.

"He was in Borneo for many years, wasn't he?"

"He's hateful," she said vehemently. "I detest him!"

She did not explain the cause of her detestation, and Michael thought it discreet not to press the question, but presently she relieved him of responsibility.

"I've been to his house twice. He has a very fine garden, which Mr. Knebworth has used before. I only went as an extra and was very much in the background. I wish I had been more so! He has queer ideas about women, especially about actresses—not that I'm an actress," she added hastily, "but I mean people who play for a living. Thank Heaven, there's only one scene to be shot at Griff, and perhaps he will not be at home, but that's unlikely. He's always there when I go." She seemed quite sure.

Michael glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. His first impression of her beauty was more than confirmed. There was a certain wistfulness in her face which was very appealing; an

honesty in the dark eyes that told him all he wanted to know about her attitude toward the admiration of the unknown Sir Gregory.

"It's queer how all baronets are villains in stories," he said, "and queerer still that most of the baronets I've known have been men of singular morals. I'm bothering you, being here, am I not?" he asked, dropping his tone of banter.

She looked round at him.

"You are a little," she said frankly. "You see, Mr. Brixan, this is my big chance. It's a chance that really never comes to an extra except in stories, and I'm frightened to death of what is going to happen. You make me nervous, but what makes me more panic-stricken is that the first scene is to be shot at Griff. I hate it—I hate it!" she said almost savagely. "That big, hard-looking house, with its hideous stuffed tigers and its awful-looking swords——"

"Swords?" he asked quickly. "What do you mean?"

"The walls are covered with them—eastern swords. They make me shiver to see them. But Sir Gregory takes a delight in them; he told Mr. Knebworth the last time we were there that the swords were as sharp now as they were

when they came from the hands of their makers, and some of them were three hundred years old. He's an extraordinary man; he can cut an apple in half on your hand and never so much as scratch you. That is one of his favorite stunts."

Michael looked interested.

"There is the house!" She pointed. "Ugh! It makes me shiver."

Griff Towers was one of those old, bleak-looking buildings that it had been the delight of the early Victorian architects to erect. Its one gray tower, placed on the left wing, gave it a lopsided appearance, but even this distortion did not attract from its rectangular unloveliness. The place seemed all the more bare, since the walls were innocent of greenery, and it stood starkly in the midst of a yellow expanse of gravel.

"Looks almost like a barracks," said Michael, "with a parade ground in front!"

They passed through the lodge gates, and the char-à-banc stopped halfway up the drive. The gardens apparently were in the rear of the building, and certainly there was nothing that would attract the most careless of directors in its uninteresting façade.

Michael got down from his seat and found Jack Knebworth already superintending the un-

loading of a camera and reflectors. Behind the char-à-banc came the big dynamo lorry, with three sun arcs that were to enhance the value of daylight.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" growled Jack. "Now you'll oblige me, Mr. Brixan, by not getting in the way? I've got a morning's work ahead of me."

"I want you to take me on as a—what is the word?—extra," said Michael.

The old man frowned at him.

"Say, what's the idea?" he asked Brixan suspiciously.

"I have an excellent reason, and I promise you that nothing I do will in any way embarrass you. The truth is, Mr. Knebworth, I want to be around for the remainder of the day, and I need an excuse."

Jack Knebworth bit his lip, scratched his long chin, scowled, and then:

"All right," he said gruffly, "maybe you'll come in handy, though I'll have quite enough bother directing one amateur, and if you get into the picture on this trip, you're going to be lucky!"

There was a man of the party, a tall young man whose hair was brushed back from his fore-

head, and it was so tidy and well arranged that it seemed as if it had originally been stuck by glue and varnished over. He was a tall, somewhat good-looking boy, who had sat on Adele's left throughout the journey and had not spoken once; now he raised his eyebrows at the appearance of Michael, and, strolling across to the harassed Knebworth, his hands in his pockets, he asked with a hurt air:

"I say, Mr. Knebworth, who is this person?"

"What person?" growled old Jack. "You mean Brixan? He's an extra."

"Oh, an extra, is he?" said the young man. "I say, it's pretty desperately awful when extras hobnob with principals! And this Leamington girl—she's simply going to mess up the picture, by Jove!"

"Is she, by Jove?" snarled Knebworth. "Now, see here, Mr. Connolly, I ain't so much in love with your work that I'm willing to admit in advance that even an extra is going to mess up this picture."

"I've never played opposite to an extra in my life, dash it all!"

"Then you must have felt lonely," grunted Jack, busy with his unpacking.

"Now, Mendoza is an *artiste*," began the

youthful leading man, and Jack Knebworth straightened his back.

"Get over there till you're wanted, you!" he roared. "When I need advice from pretty boys I'll come to you—see? For the moment you're *de trop*, which is a French expression meaning that you're standing on ground there's a better use for."

The disgruntled Reggie Connolly strolled away, with a shrug of his thin shoulders, which indicated not only his conviction that the picture would fail, but that the responsibility was everywhere but under his hat.

From the big doorway of Griff Towers, Sir Gregory Penne was watching the assembling of the company. He was a thickset man, and the sun of Borneo and an unrestricted appetite had dyed his skin a color which was between purple and brown. His face was covered with innumerable ridges, his eyes looked forth upon the world through two narrow slits. The rounded feminine chin seemed to be the only part of his face that sunshine and stronger stimulants had left in its natural condition.

Michael watched him, as he strolled down the slope to where they were standing, guessing his identity. He wore a golf suit of a loud check,

in which red predominated, and a big cap of the same material was pulled down over his eyes. Taking the stub of a cigar from his teeth, with a quick and characteristic gesture, he wiped his scanty mustache with his knuckles.

"Good morning, Knebworth," he called to the director.

His voice was harsh and cruel; a voice that had never been mellowed by laughter, or made soft by the tendernesses of humanity.

"Good morning, Sir Gregory."

Old Knebworth disentangled himself from his company.

"Sorry I'm late."

"Don't apologize," said the other. "Only I thought you were going to shoot earlier. Brought my little girl, eh?"

"Your little girl?" Jack looked at him, frankly nonplused. "You mean Mendoza. No, she's not coming."

"I don't mean Mendoza, if that's the dark girl. Never mind—I was only joking."

Who the blazes was his little girl, thought Jack, who was ignorant of two unhappy experiences which an unconsidered extra girl had had on previous visits. The mystery, however, was soon cleared up, for the baronet walked slowly

to where Adele Leamington was making a pretense of studying her script.

"Good morning, little lady," he said, lifting his cap an eighth of an inch from his head.

"Good morning, Sir Gregory," she said coldly.

"You didn't keep your promise." He shook his head waggishly. "Oh, woman, woman!"

"I don't remember I made a promise," said the girl quietly. "You asked me to come to dinner with you, and I told you that that was impossible."

"I promised to send my car for you. Don't say it was too far away. Never mind, never mind." And, to Michael's wrath, he squeezed the girl's arm in a manner which was intended to be paternal, but which filled the girl with indignant loathing.

She wrenched her arm free and, turning her back upon her tormentor, almost flew to Jack Knebworth, with an incoherent demand for information on the reading of a line which was perfectly simple.

Old Jack was no fool. He watched the play from under his eyelids, recognizing all the symptoms.

"This is the last time we shall shoot at Griff Towers," he told himself.



For Jack Knebworth was something of a stickler on behavior, and he had views on women which were diametrically opposite to those held by Sir Gregory Penne.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SWORDS AND BHAG

THE little party moved away, and they left Michael alone with the baronet. For a period Gregory Penne watched the girl, his eyes glittering; then he became aware of Michael's presence and turned a cold, insolent stare upon the other.

"What are you?" he asked, looking the detective up and down.

"I'm an extra," said Michael.

"An extra, eh? Sort of chorus boy? Put paint and powder on your face and all that sort of thing? What a life for a man!"

"There are worse," said Michael, holding his antagonism in check.

"Do you know that little girl—what's her name, Leamington?" asked the baronet suddenly.

"I know her extremely well," said Michael untruthfully.

"Oh, you do, eh?" said the master of Griff Towers with sudden amiability. "She's a nice little thing. Quite a cut above the ordinary

chorus girl. You might bring her along to dinner one night. She'd come with you, eh?"

The contortions of the puffy eyelids suggested to Michael that the man had winked. There was something about this gross figure that interested the scientist in Michael Brixan. He was elemental; an animal invested with a brain; and yet he must be something more than that if he had held a high administrative position under the government.

"Are you acting? If you're not, you can come up and have a look at my swords," said the man suddenly.

Michael guessed that, for a reason of his own, probably because of his claim to be Adele's friend, the man wished to cultivate his acquaintance.

"No, I'm not acting," replied Michael.

And no invitation could have given him greater pleasure. Had their owner but realized the fact, Michael Brixan had already made up his mind not to leave Griff Towers until he had inspected the peculiar collection.

"Yes, she's a nice little girl."

Penne returned to the subject immediately, as they paced up the slope toward the house.

"As I say, a cut above chorus girls—young,

unsophisticated, virginal! You can have your sophisticated girls. There is no mystery to 'em! They revolt me. A girl should be like a spring flower. Give me the violet and the snowdrop; you can have a bushel of cabbage roses for one petal of the shy dears of the forest."

Michael listened with a keen sense of nausea, and yet with an unusual interest, as the man rambled on. He said things which were sickening, monstrous. There were moments when Brixan found it difficult to keep his hands off the obscene figure that paced at his side; and only by adopting toward him the attitude which the enthusiastic naturalist employs in his dealings with snakes, was he able to get a grip on himself.

The big entrance hall into which he was ushered was paved with earthen tiles, and, looking up at the stone walls, Michael had his first glimpse of the famous swords.

There were hundreds of them—poniards, scimitars, ancient swords of Japan, basket-hilted hangers, two-handled swords that had felt the grip of long-dead Crusaders.

"What do you think of 'em, eh?" Sir Gregory Penne spoke with the pride of an enthusiastic collector. "There isn't one of them that could

be duplicated, my boy! and they're only a part of my collection."

He led his visitor along a broad corridor, lighted by square windows set at intervals, and here again the walls were covered with shining weapons. Throwing open a door, Sir Gregory ushered the other into a large room which was evidently his library, though the books were few, and, so far as Michael could see at first glance, the conventional volumes that are to be found in the houses of the country gentry. Over the mantel were two great swords of a pattern which Michael did not remember having seen before.

"What do you think of those?"

Penne lifted one from the silver hook which supported it, and he drew it from its scabbard.

"Don't feel the edge unless you want to cut yourself. This would split a hair, but it would also cut you in two, and you would never know what happened till you fell apart!"

Suddenly his manner changed, and he almost snatched the sword from Michael's hand, and, putting it back in its sheath, he hung it up.

"That is a Sumatran sword, isn't it?"

"It comes from Borneo," said the baronet shortly.

"The home of the head-hunters."

Sir Gregory looked around, his brows lowered.

"No," he said, "it comes from Dutch Borneo."

Evidently there was something about this weapon which aroused unpleasant memories. He glowered for a long time in silence into the little fire that was burning on the hearth.

"I killed the man who owned that," he said at last, and it struck Michael that he was speaking more to himself than to his visitor. "At least I hope I killed him—I hope so!"

He glanced around, and Michael Brixan could have sworn there was apprehension in his eyes.

"Sit down—what's your name?" he asked, pointing to a low settee. "We'll have a drink."

He pushed a bell, and, to Michael's astonishment, the summons was answered by an undersized native, a little copper-colored man, naked to the waist. Gregory gave an order in a language which was unintelligible to Michael—he guessed, by its sibilants, it was Malaysian—and the servant, with a quick salaam, disappeared and came back almost instantly with a tray containing a large decanter and two thin glasses.

"I have no white servants—can't stand 'em," said Penne, taking the contents of his glass at

a gulp. "I like servants who don't steal and don't gossip. You can lick 'em if they misbehave, and there's no trouble. I got this fellow last year in Sumatra, and he's the best butler I've had."

"Do you go to Borneo every year?" asked Michael.

"I go almost every year," said the other. "I've got a yacht; she's lying at Southampton now. If I didn't get out of this cursed country once a year, I'd go mad. There's nothing here—nothing! Have you ever met that dithering old fool, Longvale? Knebworth said you were going on to him—pompous old ass, who lives in the past and dresses like an advertisement for somebody's whiskey. Have another?"

"I haven't finished this yet," said Michael with a smile, and his eyes went up to the sword above the mantelpiece. "Have you had that very long? It looks modern."

"It isn't," snapped the other. "Modern—it's three hundred years old if it's a day. I've only had it a year." Again he changed the subject abruptly. "I like you. I like people, or I dislike them, instantly. You're the sort of fellow who'd do well in the East. I've made two millions there. The East is full of wonder, full of

unbelievable things." He screwed his head round and fixed Michael with a glittering eye. "Full of good servants," he said slowly. "Would you like to meet the perfect servant?"

There was something peculiar in his tone, and Michael nodded.

"Would you like to see the slave who never asks questions and never disobeys, who has no love but love of me"—he thumped himself on the chest—"no hate but for the people I hate—my trusty—Bhag?"

He rose and crossing to his table, turned a little switch that Michael had noticed attached to the side of the desk. As he did so, a part of the paneled wall at the farther end of the room swung open. For a second Michael saw nothing, and then there emerged, blinking into the daylight, a most sinister, a most terrifying figure. And Michael Brixan had need of all his self-control to check the exclamation that rose to his lips.



## CHAPTER VIII

### BHAG

It was a great orang-outang. Crouched as it was, gazing malignantly upon the visitor, with its beadlike eyes, it stood over six feet in height. The hairy chest was enormous; the arms that almost touched the floor were as thick as an average man's thigh. It wore a pair of workman's dark blue overalls, held in place by two straps that crossed its broad shoulders.

"Bhag!" called Sir Gregory in a voice so soft that Michael could not believe it was the man's own. "Come here."

The gigantic figure waddled across the room to where they stood before the fireplace.

"This is a friend of mine, Bhag."

The great ape held out his hand, and for a second Michael's was held in its velvet palm. This done, he lifted his paw to his nose and sniffed loudly, the only sound he made.

"Get me some cigars," said Penne.

Immediately the ape walked to a cabinet, pulled open a drawer, and brought out a box.

"Not those," said Gregory. "The small ones."

He spoke distinctly, as if he were articulating to somebody who was deaf, and, without a moment's hesitation, the hideous Bhag replaced the box and brought out another.

"Pour me out a whiskey and soda."

The ape obeyed. He did not spill a drop and, when his owner said "Enough," replaced the stopper in the decanter and put it back.

"Thank you, that will do, Bhag."

Without a sound the ape waddled back to the open paneling and disappeared, and the door closed behind him.

"Why, the thing is human," said Michael in an awe-struck whisper.

Sir Gregory Penne chuckled. "More than human," he said. "Bhag is my shield against all trouble." His eyes seemed to go instantly to the sword above the mantelpiece.

"Where does he live?"

"He's got a little apartment of his own, and he keeps it clean. He feeds with the servants."

"Good Lord!" gasped Michael, and the other chuckled again at the surprise he had aroused.

"Yes, he feeds with the servants. They're afraid of him, but they worship him; he's a sort of god to them, but they're afraid of him. Do you know what would have happened if I'd

said 'This man is my enemy?' " He pointed his stubby finger at Michael's chest. "He would have torn you limb from limb. You wouldn't have had a chance, Mr. What's-your-name, not a dog's chance. And yet he can be gentle—yes, he can be gentle." He nodded. "And cunning! He goes out almost every night, and I've no complaints from the villagers. No sheep stolen, nobody frightened. He just goes out, loafs around in the woods, and doesn't kill as much as a hen partridge."

"How long have you had him?"

"Eight or nine years," said the baronet carelessly, swallowing the whiskey that the ape had poured for him. "Now, let's go out and see the actors and actresses. She's a nice girl, eh? You're not forgetting you're going to bring her to dinner, are you? What is your name?"

"Brixan," said Michael, "Michael Brixan."

Sir Gregory grunted something.

"I'll remember that—Brixan. I ought to have told Bhag. He likes to know."

"Would he have known me again, if you had told him?" asked Michael, smiling.

"Known you?" said the baronet contemptuously. "He will not only know you, but he will be able to trail you down. Notice him smelling

his hand? He was filing you for reference, my boy. If I told him 'Go along and take **this** message to Brixan,' he'd find you."

When they reached the lovely gardens at the back of the house, the first scene had been shot, and there was a smile on Jack Knebworth's face which suggested that Adele's misgivings had not been justified. And so it proved.

"That girl's a peach," Jack unbent to say. "A natural-born actress, built for this scene. It's almost too good to be true. What do you want?"

It was Mr. Reggie Connolly, and he had the obsession which is perpetual in every leading man. He felt that sufficient opportunities had not been offered to him.

"I say, Mr. Knebworth," he said in a grieved tone, "I'm not getting much of the fat in **this** story! So far there's about thirty feet of me in this picture. I say, that's not right, you know! If a johnny is being featured—"

"You're not being featured," said Jack shortly. "And Mendoza's chief complaint was that there was too much of you in it."

Michael looked around. Sir Gregory Penne had strolled toward where the girl was standing, and in her state of elation she had no room

in her heart even for her resentment against the man she so cordially detested.

"Little girl, I want to speak to you before you go," he said, dropping his voice, and for once she smiled at him.

"Well, you have a good opportunity now, Sir Gregory," she said.

"I want to tell you how sorry I am for what happened the other day, and I respect you for what you said, for a girl's entitled to keep her kisses for the men she likes. Am I right?"

"Of course you're right," she said. "Please don't think any more about it, Sir Gregory."

"I'd no right to kiss you against your will, especially when you're in my house. Are you going to forgive me?"

"I do forgive you," she said and would have left him, but he caught her arm.

"You're coming to dinner, aren't you?" He jerked his head toward the watchful Michael. "Your friend said he'd bring you along."

"Which friend?" she asked, her eyebrows raised. "You mean Mr. Brixan?"

"That's the fellow. Why do you make friends with that kind of man? Not that he isn't a decent fellow. I like him personally. Will you come along to dinner?"

"I'm afraid I can't," she said, her old aversion gaining ground.

"Little girl," he said earnestly, "there's nothing you couldn't have from me. Why do you want to trouble your pretty head about this cheap play acting? I'll give you a company of your own, if you want it, and the best car that money can buy."

His eyes were like points of fire, and she shivered.

"I have all I want, Sir Gregory," she said.

She was furious with Michael Brixan. How dared he presume to accept an invitation on her behalf? How dare he call himself her friend? Her anger almost smothered her dislike for her persecutor.

"You come over tonight—let him bring you." said Penne huskily. "I want you tonight—do you hear? You're staying at old Longvale's. You can easily slip out."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I don't think you know what you're talking about, Sir Gregory," she said quietly. "Whatever you mean, it is an insult to me."

Turning abruptly, she left him. Michael would have spoken to her, but she passed, her head in the air, a look on her face which dismayed him,

though, after a moment's consideration, he could guess the cause.

When the various things were packed, and the company had taken their seats in the char-à-banc, Michael observed that she had very carefully placed herself between Jack Knebworth and the sulking leading man, and he wisely chose a seat some distance from her.

The car was about to start when Sir Gregory came up to him, and stepping on the running board:

"You said you'd get her over," he began.

"If I said that," said Michael, "I must have been drunk, and it takes more than one glass of whiskey to reduce me to that disgusting condition. Miss Leamington is a free agent, and she would be singularly ill-advised to dine alone with you or any other man."

He expected an angry outburst, but, to his surprise, the squat man only laughed and waved him a pleasant farewell. Looking around, as the car turned from the lodge gates, Michael saw him standing on the lawn, talking to a man, and he recognized Foss who, for some reason, had stayed behind.

And then his eyes strayed past the two men to the window of the library, where the mon-

strous Bhag sat in his darkened room, waiting for instructions which he would carry into effect without reason or pity. Michael Brixan, hardened as he was to danger of every variety, found himself shuddering.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE ANCESTOR

THE Dower House was away from the main road. A sprawling mass of low buildings, it stood behind untidy hedges and crumbling walls. Once the place had enjoyed the services of a lodge keeper, but the tiny lodge was deserted, the windows broken, and there were gaps in the tiled roof. The gates had not been closed for generations; they were broken and leaned crazily against the walls to which they had been thrust by the last person who had employed them to guard the entrance of the Dower House.

What had once been a fair lawn was now a tangle of weeds. Thistles and weeds grew where the gallants of old had played their bowls; and it was clear to Michael, from his one glance, that only a portion of the house was used. In only one of the wings were the windows whole; the others were broken or so grimed with dirt that they appeared to have been painted.

His amusement blended with curiosity, Michael saw for the first time the picturesque

Mr. Sampson Longvale. He came out to meet them, his bald head glistening in the afternoon sunlight, his strapped fawn-colored trousers, velvet waistcoat and old-fashioned stock completely supporting Gregory Penne's description of him.

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Knebworth. I've a very poor house, but I offer you a very rich welcome! I have had tea served in my little dining room. Will you please introduce me to the members of your company?"

The courtesy and the Old World spirit of dignity were very charming, and Michael felt a warm glow toward this fine old man who had brought to this modern atmosphere the love and the fragrance of a past age.

"I should like to shoot a scene before we lose the light, Mr. Longvale," said Knebworth; "so, if you don't mind the meal being a scrambling one, I can give the company a quarter of an hour." He looked around. "Where is Foss?" he asked. "I want to change a scene."

"Mr. Foss said he was walking from Griff Towers," said one of the company. "He stopped behind to speak to Sir Gregory."

Jack Knebworth cursed his dilatory scenario man with vigor and originality.

"I hope he hasn't stopped to borrow money,"

he said savagely. "That fellow's going to ruin my credit if I'm not careful."

He had overcome his objection to his new extra; possibly he felt that there was nobody else in the party whom he could take into his confidence without hurt to discipline.

"Is he that way inclined?"

"He's always short of money and always trying to make it by some fool trick which leaves him shorter than he was before. When a man gets that kind of bug in his head, he's only a block away from prison. Are you going to stay the night? I don't think you'll be able to sleep here," he said, changing the subject, "but I suppose you'll be going back to London?"

"Not tonight," said Michael quickly. "Don't worry about me. I particularly do not wish to give you any trouble."

"Come and meet the old man," said Knebworth under his breath. "He's a queer old devil with the heart of a child."

"I like what I've seen of him," said Michael.

Mr. Longvale accepted the introduction all over again.

"I fear there will not be sufficient room in my dining room for the whole company. I have had a little table laid in my study. Perhaps you and

your friends would like to have your tea there?"

"Why, that's very kind of you, Mr. Longvale. You have met Mr. Brixan?"

The old man smiled and nodded.

"I have met him without realizing that I've met him. I never remember names—a curious failing which was shared by my great-great-uncle Charles, with the result that he fell into extraordinary confusion when he wrote his memoirs, and in consequence many of the incidents he relates have been regarded as apocryphal."

He showed them into a narrow room that ran from the front to the back of the house. The ceiling was supported by black rafters; the open wainscoting, polished and worn by generations of hands, must have been at least five hundred years old. There were no swords over this mantelpiece, thought Michael with an inward smile. Instead, there was a portrait of a handsome old gentleman, the dignity of whose face was arresting. There was only one word to furnish an adequate description: it was majestic.

He made no comment on the picture, nor did the old man speak of it till later. The meal was hastily disposed of, and, sitting on the wall

outside, Michael watched the last daylight scene shot, and he was struck by the plastic genius of the girl. He knew enough of motion pictures and their construction to realize what it meant to the director to have in his hands one who could so faithfully reproduce the movements and the emotions which the old man dictated.

In other circumstances he might have thought it grotesque to see Jack Knebworth pretending to be a young girl, resting his elderly cheek coyly upon the back of his clasped hand, and walking with mincing steps from one side of the picture to the other. But he knew that the American was a mason who was cutting roughly the shape of the sculpture and leaving it to the finer artist to express in her personality the delicate contours that would delight the eye of the picture-loving world. She was no longer Adele Leamington; she was Roselle, the heiress to an estate, of which her wicked cousin was trying to deprive her. The story itself he recognized as a half-and-half plagiarism of a well-known tale. He mentioned this fact when the scene was finished.

"I guess it's a steal," said Jack Knebworth philosophically, "and I didn't inquire too closely into it. It's Foss' story, and I should be pained

to discover there was anything original in it."

Mr. Foss had made a tardy reappearance, and Michael found himself wondering what was the nature of that confidential interview which the writer had had with Sir Gregory.

Going back to the long sitting room he stood watching the daylight fade, as he speculated upon the one mystery within a mystery—the extraordinary effect which Adele had produced upon him.

Michael Brixan had known many beautiful women, women in every class of society. He had known the best and the worst, he had jailed a few, and he had watched one face a French firing squad one gray, wintry morning at Vincennes. He had liked many, nearly loved one, and it seemed, cold-bloodedly analyzing his emotions, that he was in danger of actually loving a girl whom he had never met before that morning.

"Which is absurd," he said aloud.

"What is absurd?" asked Knebworth, who had come into the room unnoticed.

"I also wondered what you were thinking," smiled old Mr. Longvale, who had been watching the young man in silence.

"I—er—well, I was thinking of the portrait."

Michael turned and indicated the picture above the fireplace, and in a sense he spoke the truth, for the thread of that thought had run through all others. "The face seemed familiar," he said, "which is absurd, because it is obviously an old painting."

Mr. Longvale lit two candles and carried one to the portrait. Again Michael looked, and again the majesty of the face impressed him.

"That is my great-great-uncle, Charles Henry," said old Mr. Longvale with pride. "Or, as we call him affectionately in our family, the Great Monsieur."

Michael's face was half turned toward the window, as the old man spoke. Suddenly the room seemed to spin before his eyes. Jack Knebworth saw his face go white and caught him by the arm.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Michael unsteadily.

Knebworth was staring past him at the window.

"What was that?" he said.

With the exception of the illumination from the two candles and the faint dusk light that came from the garden, the room was in darkness.

"Did you see it?" he asked and ran to the window, staring out.

"What was it?" asked old Mr. Longvale, joining him.

"I could have sworn I saw a head in the window. Did you see it, Brixan?"

"I saw something," said Michael unsteadily. "Do you mind if I go out into the garden?"

"I hoped you saw it. It looked like a huge monkey's head to me."

Michael nodded. He walked down the flagged passage into the garden, and, as he did so, slipped a Browning from his hip, pressed down the safety catch, and dropped the pistol into his jacket pocket. He disappeared, and five minutes later Knebworth saw him pacing the garden path and went out to see him.

"Did you see anything?"

"Nothing in the garden. You must have been mistaken."

"But didn't you see him?"

Michael hesitated. "I thought I saw something," he said with an assumption of carelessness. "When are you going to shoot those night pictures of yours?"

"You saw something, Brixan—was it a face?"

Mike Brixan nodded.



## CHAPTER X

### THE OPEN WINDOW

THE dynamo wagon was humming, as he walked down the garden path, and, with a hiss and a splutter from the arcs, the front of the cottage was suddenly illuminated by their fierce light. Outside on the road a motorist had pulled up to look upon the unusual spectacle.

"What is happening?" he asked curiously.

"They're taking a picture," said Michael.

"Oh, is that what it is? I suppose it is one of Knebworth's outfits?"

"Where are you going?" demanded Michael suddenly. "Forgive my asking you, but if you're heading for Chichester you can render me a very great service if you give me a lift."

"Jump in," said the man. "I'm going to Petworth, but it will not be much out of my way to take you into the city."

Until they came to the town he plied Michael with questions, betraying that universal inquisitiveness which picture making invariably incites in the uninitiated.

Michael got down near the market place and made his way to the house of a man he knew, a former master at his old school, now settled down in Chichester, who had, among other possessions, an excellent library. Declining his host's pressing invitation to dinner, Michael stated his needs, and the old master laughed.

"I can't remember that you were much of a student in my days, Michael," he said, "but you may have the run of the library. Is it some line of Virgil that escapes you? I may be able to save you a hunt."

"It's not Virgil," said Michael. "Something infinitely more full-blooded."

He was in the library for twenty minutes, and when he emerged there was a light of triumph in his eye.

"I'm going to use your telephone, if I may," he said, and he got London without delay.

For ten minutes he was speaking with Scotland Yard, and, when he had finished, he went into the dining room, where the master, who was a bachelor, was eating his solitary dinner.

"You can render me one more service, mentor of my youth," he said. "Have you in this abode of peace an automatic pistol that throws a heavier shell than this?"

And he put his own on the table. Michael knew Mr. Scott had been an officer of the army and incidentally an instructor of the officers' training corps, so that his request was not as impossible of fulfillment as it appeared.

"Yes, I can give you a heavier one than that. What are you shooting—elephants?"

"Something a trifle more dangerous," said Michael.

"Curiosity was never a weakness of mine," said the master and went out to return with a Browning of heavy caliber and a box of cartridges.

They spent five minutes cleaning the pistol, which had not been in use for some time, and, with his new weapon weighing down his jacket pocket, Mike took his leave, carrying a lighter heart and a clearer understanding than he had enjoyed when he arrived at the house. He hired a car from a local garage and drove back to the Dower House, dismissing the car just short of his destination. Jack Knebworth had not even noticed that he had disappeared. But old Mr. Longvale, wearing a coat with many capes and a soft silk cap, from which dangled a long tassel, came to him almost as soon as he entered the garden.

"Can I speak to you, Mr. Brixan?" he said in a low voice, and they went into the house together. "Do you remember Mr. Knebworth was very much perturbed because he thought he saw somebody peering in at the window—something with a monkey's head?"

Michael nodded.

"Well, it is a most curious fact," said the old gentleman impressively, "that a quarter of an hour ago I happened to be walking in the far end of my garden, and looking across the hedge toward the field I suddenly saw a gigantic form rise, apparently from the ground, and move toward these bushes." He pointed through the window to a clump in a field on the opposite side of the road. "He seemed to be crouching forward and moving furtively."

"Will you show me the place?" said Michael quickly.

He followed the other across the road to the bushes, a little clump which was now empty when they reached it. Kneeling down to make a new sky line, Michael scanned the limited horizon, but there was no sign of Bhag. For that it was Bhag, he had no doubt. There might be nothing in it. Penne told him that the animal was in the habit of taking nightly strolls, and

that he was perfectly harmless. Suppose—. The thought was absurd, fantastically absurd. And yet the animal had been so extraordinarily human that no speculation in connection with it was quite absurd.

When he returned to the garden, he went in search of the girl. She had finished her scene and was watching the stealthy movements of two screen burglars, who were creeping along the wall in the subdued light of the arcs.

"Excuse me, Miss Leamington, I'm going to ask you an impertinent question. Have you brought a complete change of clothes with you?"

"Why ever do you ask that?" she demanded, her eyes wide open. "Of course I did! I always bring a complete change in case the weather breaks."

He went on.

"That's one question. Did you lose anything when you were at Griff Towers?"

"I lost my gloves," she said quickly. "Did you find them?"

"No. When did you miss them?"

"I missed them immediately. I thought for a moment—" She stopped. "It was a foolish idea, but—"

"What did you think?" he asked.

"I'd rather not tell you. It is a purely personal matter."

"You thought that Sir Gregory had taken them as a souvenir?"

Even in the half darkness he saw her color come and go.

"I did think that," she said, a little stiffly.

"Then it doesn't matter very much about your change of clothing," he said.

"Whatever are you talking about?"

She looked at him suspiciously. He guessed she thought that he had been drinking, but the last thing in the world he wanted to do at that moment was to explain his somewhat disjointed questions.

"Now, everybody is going to bed!"

It was old Jack Knebworth talking.

"Everybody! Off you go! Mr. Foss has shown you your rooms. I want you up at four o'clock tomorrow morning, so get as much sleep as you can. Foss, you've marked the rooms?"

"Yes," said the man. "I've put the names on every door. I've given this young lady a room to herself. Is that right?"

"I suppose it is," said Knebworth dubiously. "Anyway, she won't be there long enough to get used to it."

The girl said good night to the detective and went straight up to her apartment. It was a tiny room, smelling somewhat musty and was simply furnished. A small bed, a chest of drawers with a swinging glass on top, and a small table and chair completed the furniture in the apartment. By the light of her candle the floor showed signs of having been recently scrubbed, and the center was covered by threadbare carpet.

She locked the door, blew out the candle, and, undressing in the dark, went to the window and threw open the casement. And then for the first time she saw on the center of one of the small panes a circular disk of paper. It was pasted on the outside of the window, and at first she was about to pull it off, when she guessed that it might be some indicator placed by Knebworth to mark an exact position that he required for the morning picture taking.

She did not immediately fall asleep, her mind, for some curious reason, being occupied unprofitably with a tumultuous sense of annoyance directed toward Michael Brixan. For a long time a strong sense of justice fought with a sense of humor equally powerful. He was a nice man, she told herself; the sixth sense of woman

had already delivered that information, heavily underlined. He certainly had nerve. In the end humor brought sleep. She was smiling when her eyelids closed.

She had been sleeping two hours, though it did not seem two seconds. A sense of impending danger wakened her, and she sat up in bed, her heart thumping wildly. She looked around the room. In the pale moonlight she could see almost every corner, and it was empty. Was it somebody outside the door that had wakened her? She tried the handle of the door; it was locked, as she had left it. The window? It was very near to the ground, she remembered. Stepping to the window, she pulled one casement close. She was closing the other when, out of the darkness below, reached a great hairy arm, and a hand closed like a vise on her wrist.

She did not scream. She stood breathless, dying of terror, she felt. Her heart ceased beating, and she was conscious of a deadly cold. What was it? What could it be? Summoning all her courage, she looked out of the window into a hideous, bestial face and two round, green eyes that stared into hers.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE MARK ON THE WINDOW

THE thing was twittering at her, soft, birdlike noises, and she saw the flash of its teeth in the darkness. It was not pulling, it was simply holding; one hand was gripping the tendrils of the ivy up which it had climbed, the other hand firmly about her wrist. Again it twittered and pulled. She drew back, but she might as well have tried to draw back from a moving piston rod. A great, hairy leg was suddenly flung over the sill; the second hand came up and covered her face.

The sound of her scream was deadened in the hairy paw, but somebody heard it. From the ground below came a flash of fire and the deafening noise of an exploding pistol. A bullet zipped and crashed amongst the ivy, striking the brickwork, and she heard the whirr of the ricochet. Instantly the great monkey released his hold and dropped down out of sight. Half swooning, Adele dropped upon the window sill, incapable of movement. And then she saw a

figure come out of the shadow of the laurel bush, and instantly she recognized the midnight prowler. It was Michael Brixan.

"Are you hurt?" he asked in a low voice.

She could only shake her head, for speech was denied her.

"I didn't hit him, did I?"

With an effort she found the husk of a voice in her dry throat. "No, I don't think so. He dropped."

Michael pulled an electric torch from his pocket and was searching the ground. "No sign of blood. He was rather difficult to hit. I was afraid of hurting you, too."

A window had been thrown up, and Jack Knebworth's voice bawled into the night.

"What's the shooting? Is that you, Brixan?"

"It is I. Come down, and I'll tell you all about it."

The noise did not seem to have aroused Mr. Longvale, or, for the matter of that, any other member of the party; and when Knebworth reached the garden he found no other audience than Mike Brixan. In a few words Michael told him what he had seen.

"The monkey belongs to friend Penne," he said. "I saw it this morning."

"What do you think—that he was prowling round and saw the open window?"

Michael shook his head. "No," he said quietly, "he came with one intention and purpose, which was to carry off your leading lady. That sounds highly dramatic and improbable, and that is the opinion I have formed. This ape, I tell you, is nearly human."

"But he wouldn't know the girl. He has never seen her."

"He could smell her," said Mike instantly. "She lost a pair of gloves at the Towers today, and it's any odds that they were stolen by the noble Gregory Penne, so that he might introduce to Bhag an unfailing scent."

"I can't believe it; it is incredible! Though I'll admit," said Jack Knebworth thoughtfully, "that these big apes do some amazing things. Did you shoot him?"

"No, sir; I didn't shoot him, but I can tell you this, he's an animal that's been gunned before, or he'd have come for me, in which case he would have been dead by now."

"What were you doing round here, anyway?"

"Just watching out," said the other carelessly. "The earnest detective has so many things on his conscience that he can't sleep like ordinary

people. Speaking for myself, I never intended leaving the garden, because I expected Brer Bhag. Who is that?"

The door opened, and a slim figure, wrapped in a dressing gown, came out into the open.

"Young lady, you're going to catch a very fine cold," warned Knebworth. "What happened to you?"

"I don't know." She was feeling her wrist tenderly. "I heard something and went to the window, and then this horrible thing caught hold of me. What was it, Mr. Brixan?"

"It was nothing more alarming than a monkey," said he with affected unconcern. "I'm sorry you were so scared. I guess the shooting worried you more?"

"You don't guess anything of the kind. You know it didn't. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!" She covered her white face with her trembling hands.

Old Jack grunted.

"I think she's right, too. You owe something to our friend here, young lady. Apparently he was expecting this visit and watched in the garden."

"You expected it?" she gasped.

"Mr. Knebworth has made rather more of the

part I played than can be justified," said Mike. "And if you think that this is a hero's natural modesty, you're mistaken. I did expect this gentleman, because he'd been seen in the fields by Mr. Longvale. And you thought you saw him yourself, didn't you, Knebworth?"

Jack nodded.

"In fact, we all saw him," Mike went on, "and, as I didn't like the idea of a coming star being subjected to the annoyance of visiting monkeys, I sat up in the garden."

With a sudden impulsive gesture she put out her little hand, and Michael took it.

"Thank you, Mr. Brixan," she said. "I have been wrong about you."

"Who isn't?" asked Mike with an extravagant shrug.

She returned to her room, and this time she closed the window. Once, before she finally went to sleep, she rose and, peeping through the curtains, saw the little glowing point of the watcher's cigar; then she went back to bed, comforted. It seemed only a few minutes before Foss began knocking on the doors to awaken the company.

The literary man himself was the first down. The garden was beginning to show in the pale

light of dawn, and he bade Michael Brixan a gruff good morning.

"Good morning to you," said Michael. "By the way, Mr. Foss, you stayed behind at Griff Towers today to see our friend, Penne?"

"That's no business of yours," growled the man, and he would have passed on, but Michael stood squarely in his path.

"There is one thing which is some business of mine, and that is to ask you why that little white disk appears on Miss Leamington's window?"

He pointed up to the white circle that the girl had seen the night before.

"I don't know anything about it," said Foss with rising anger, but there was also a note of fear in his voice.

"If you don't know, who does? I saw you put it there just before it got dark last night."

"Well, if you must know," said the man, "it was to mark a vision boundary for the camera man."

That sounded a plausible excuse. Michael had seen Jack Knebworth marking out boundaries in the garden to insure the actors being in the picture. At the first opportunity, when Knebworth appeared, he questioned him on the subject.

"No, I gave no instructions to put up marks. Where is it?"

Michael showed him.

"I wouldn't have a mark up there, anyway, would I? Right in the middle of a window! What do you make of it?"

"I think Foss put it there with one object. The window was marked at Gregory's request."

"But why?" asked Knebworth, staring.

"To show Adele Leamington's room to Bhag—that's why," said Michael, and he was confident that his view was an accurate one.

## CHAPTER XII

### A CRY FROM A TOWER

WITHOUT waiting to see the early morning scenes shot, Michael had decided upon a course of action. As soon as he conveniently could, he made his escape from Dower House and, crossing a field, reached the road which led to Griff Towers. Possessing a good eye for country, he had duly noted the field path which ran along the boundary of Sir Gregory Penne's estate; it was, he guessed, a short cut to Griff; and a short walk brought him to the stile where the path joined the road. He walked quickly, his eyes on the ground, looking for some trace of the beast; but there had been no rain, and, unless he had wounded the animal, there was little hope that he would pick up the trail.

Presently he came to the high flint wall which marked the southern end of the baronet's grounds, and this he followed until he came to a postern let in the wall, a door that appeared to have been recently in use; for it was ajar, he noted with satisfaction.



Pushing it open he found himself in a large field which evidently served as kitchen garden for the house. There was nobody in sight. The gray tower looked even more forbidding and ugly in the early morning light. No smoke came from the chimneys; Griff was a house of the dead. Nevertheless he proceeded cautiously and, instead of crossing the field, moved back into the shadow of the wall until he reached the high boxwood fence that ran at right angles and separated the kitchen garden from that beautiful pleasance which Jack Knebworth had used the previous morning as a background for his scenes.

And all the time he kept his eyes roving, expecting at any moment to see the hideous figure of Bhag appear from the ground. At last he reached the end of the hedge. He was now within a few paces of the graveled front and less than half a dozen yards from the high, square, gray tower which gave the big, dismal house its name.

From where he stood he could see the whole front of the house. The drawn white blinds and the general lifelessness of Griff might have convinced a less skeptical man than Mike Brixan that his suspicions were unfounded.

He was hesitating as to whether he should go to the house or not, when he heard a crash of glass, and he looked up in time to see fragments falling from the topmost room of the tower. The sun had not yet risen, the earth was still wrapped in the illusory dawn light, and the hedge made an admirable hiding place.

Who was breaking windows at this hour of the morning? Surely not the careful Bhag. So far he had reached in his speculations when the morning air was rent by a shrill scream of such fear that his flesh went cold. It came from the upper room and ended abruptly, as though somebody had put his hand over the mouth of the unfortunate from whom that cry of terror had been wrung.

Hesitating no longer, Michael stepped from his place of concealment, ran quickly across the gravel, and pulled at the bell before the great entrance, which was immediately under the tower. He heard the clang of the bell and looked quickly round, to make absolutely sure that Bhag or some of the copper-colored retainers of Griff Towers were not trailing him.

A minute passed—two—and his hand was again raised to the iron bell pull, when he heard heavy feet in the corridor, a shuffle of slippers on

the tiled floor of the hall, and a gruff voice demanded:

"Who's there?"

"Michael Brixan."

There was a grunt, a rattle of chains, a snapping of locks, and the big door opened a few inches.

Gregory Penne was wearing a pair of gray flannel trousers and a shirt the wristbands of which were unfastened.

"What do you want?" he demanded and opened the door a few more inches.

"I want to see you," said Michael.

"Usually call at daybreak?" growled the man, as he closed the door on his visitor.

Michael made no answer, but followed Gregory Penne to his room. The library had evidently been occupied throughout the night. The windows were shuttered, the electroliers were burning, and before the fire were a table and two whiskey bottles, one of which was empty.

"Have a drink?" said Penne mechanically, and he poured himself out a potion with an unsteady hand.

"Is your ape in?" asked Michael, refusing the proffered drink with a gesture.

"What, Bhag? I suppose so. He goes and

comes as he likes. Do you want to see him?"

"Not particularly," said Michael. "I've seen him once tonight."

Penne was lighting the stub of a cigar from the fire, as he spoke, and he looked round quickly.

"You've seen him before? What do you mean?"

"I saw him at Dower House, trying to get into Miss Leamington's room, and he was as near to being a dead orang-outang as he has ever been."

The man dropped the lighted cigar stub on the hearth and stood up.

"Did you shoot him?" he asked.

"I shot at him."

Gregory nodded. "You shot at him," he said softly. "That accounts for it. Why did you shoot him? He's perfectly harmless."

"He didn't strike me that way," said Michael coolly. "He was trying to pull Miss Leamington from her room."

The man's eyes opened. "He got so far, did he? Well?"

There was a pause.

"You sent him to get the girl," said Michael. "You also bribed Foss to put a mark on the win-

dow so that Bhag should know where the girl was sleeping." He paused, but the other made no reply. "The cave-man method is fairly beastly, even when the cave man does his own kidnaping. When he sends an anthropoid ape to do his dirty work, it passes into another category."

The man's eyes were invisible now; his face had grown a deeper hue. "So that's your line, is it?" he said. "I thought you were a pal."

"I'm not responsible for your illusions," said Michael. "Only I tell you this"—he tapped the man's chest with his finger—"if any harm comes to Adele Leamington that is traceable to you or your infernal agent, I shan't be contented with shooting Mr. Bhag; I will come here and shoot you! Do you understand? And now you can tell me, what is the meaning of that scream I heard from your tower?"

"Who in thunder do you imagine you're cross-questioning?" spluttered Penne, livid with fury. "You dirty, miserable little actor!"

Michael slipped a card from his pocket and put it in the man's hand.

"You'll find my title to question you legibly inscribed," he said.

The man brought the card to the table lamp

and read it. The effect was electrical. His big jaw dropped, and the hand that held the card trembled so violently that it dropped to the floor.

"A detective!" he croaked. "A—a detective! What do you want here?"

"I heard somebody scream," said Michael.

"One of the servants, maybe. We've got a Papuan woman here who's ill. In fact, she's a little mad, and we're moving her tomorrow. I'll go and see, if you like?"

He looked toward Michael, as though seeking permission. His whole attitude was one of humility, and Michael required no more than the sight of that pallid face and those chattering teeth to turn his suspicion to certainty. Something was happening in this house that he must get to the bottom of.

"May I go and see?" asked Penne.

Michael nodded. The stout man shuffled out of the room, as though he were in a hurry to be gone, and the lock clicked. Instantly Michael was at the door, turned the handle and pulled. It was locked!

He looked round the room quickly and, running to one of the windows, flung back the curtain and pulled at the shutter. But this, too,

was locked. It was, to all intents and purposes, a door with a little keyhole at the bottom. He was examining this when all the lights in the room went out, the only illumination being a faint red glow from the fire.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TRAP THAT FAILED

AND then Michael heard a faint creak in one corner of the room. It was followed by the almost imperceptible sound of bare feet on the thick pile carpet and the noise of quick breathing.

He did not hesitate. Feeling again for the keyhole of the shutter, he pulled out his pistol and fired twice at the lock. The sound of the explosion was deafening in the confined space of the room. It must have had an electrical effect upon the intruder. With a wrench the shutter opened, and at a touch the white blind sprang up, flooding with light the big, ornate room, but it was empty. Almost immediately afterward the door opened through which the baronet had passed. If he had been panic-stricken before, his condition was now pitiable.

"What's that? What's that?" he whimpered. "Did somebody shoot?"

"Somebody shot," said Michael calmly, "and I was the somebody. And the gentlemen you sent into the room to settle accounts with me



are very lucky that I confined my firing practice to the lock of your shutter, Penne."

He saw something white on the ground and, crossing the room with quick strides, picked it up. It was a scarf of coarse silk, and he smelt it.

"Somebody dropped this in their hurry," he said. "I guess it was to be used."

"My dear fellow, I assure you I didn't know."

"How is the interesting invalid?" asked Michael with a curl of his lip. "The lunatic lady who screams?"

The old man fingered his trembling lips for a moment, as though he were trying to control them.

"She's all right. It was as I—as I thought," he said; "she had some sort of fit."

Michael eyed him pensively. "I'd like to see her if I may," he said.

"You can't." Penne's voice was loud, defiant. "You can't see anybody! What do you mean by coming into my house at this hour of the morning and damaging my property? I'll have this matter reported to Scotland Yard, and I'll get the coat off your back, my man! Some of you detectives think you own the earth, but I'll show you you don't!"

The blustering voice rose to a roar. He was smothering his fear in weak anger, Michael thought, and looked up at the swords above the mantelpiece. Following the directions of his eyes, Sir Gregory wilted, and again his manner changed.

"My dear fellow, why exasperate me? I'm the nicest man in the world if you only treat me right. You've got crazy ideas about me—you have indeed!"

Michael did not argue. He walked slowly down the passage and out to meet the first sector of a blazing sun. As he reached the door, he turned to the man.

"I cannot insist upon searching your house, because I have not a warrant, as you know, and by the time I'd got a warrant there would be nothing to find. But you look out, my friend!" He waved a warning finger at the man. "I hate dragging in classical allusions, but I should advise you to look up a lady in mythology who was known to the Greeks as Adrastia.

And with this he left, walking down the drive, watched with eyes of despair by a pale-faced girl from the upper window of the tower; while Sir Gregory went back to his library and, by much

diligent searching, discovered that Adrastia was another name for Nemesis.

Michael was back at Dower House in time for breakfast. It was no great tribute to his charm that his absence had passed unnoticed—or so it appeared—though Adele had marked his disappearance and had been the first one to note his return.

Jack Knebworth was in his most cheery mood.

"I can't tell, of course, until I get back to the laboratory and develop the pictures; but so far as young Leamington is concerned, she's wonderful. I hate predicting at this early stage, but I believe that she's going to be a great artist."

"You didn't expect her to be?" asked Michael in surprise.

"I was very annoyed with Mendoza, and when I took this outfit on location I did so expecting that I should have to return and retake the picture with Mendoza in the cast. Film stars aren't born, they're made; they're made by bitter experience, patience, and suffering. But your girl has skipped all the intervening phases and has won at the first time asking."

"When you talk about my girl," said Michael carefully, "will you be good enough to remem-

ber that I have the merest and most casual interest in the lady?"

"If you're not a liar," said Jack Knebworth, "you're a piece of cheese!"

"What chance has she as a film artist?" asked Michael, anxious to turn the subject.

Knebworth ruffled his white hair.

"Precious little here in England," he said, "but she may be playing in Hollywood in twelve months' time in an English story directed by Americans!"

In the outer lobby of his office—they had returned to Chichester—he found a visitor waiting for him and gave her a curt and steely good morning.

"I want to see you, Mr. Knebworth," said Stella Mendoza, with a smile at the leading man who had followed Knebworth into his office.

"You want to see me, do you? Why, you can see me now. What do you want?"

She was pulling at a lace handkerchief, with a pretty air of penitence and confusion. Jack was not impressed. He himself had taught her all that handkerchief stuff.

"I've been very silly, Mr. Knebworth, and I've come to ask your pardon. Of course it was wrong to keep the boys and girls waiting, and

I really am sorry. Shall I come in the morning—or I can start today?"

A faint smile trembled at the corner of the director's big mouth. "You needn't come in the morning, and you needn't stay today, Stella," he said. "Your substitute did remarkably well, and I don't feel inclined to retake the picture."

She flashed an angry glance at him, a glance at total variance with her softer attitude.

"I've got a contract. I suppose you know that, Mr. Knebworth?" she said shrilly.

"I'd ever so much rather play opposite Miss Mendoza," murmured a gentle voice. It was the youthful Reggie Connolly, he of the sleek hair. "It's not easy to play opposite Miss—I don't even know her name. She's so—well, she lacks artistry, Mr. Knebworth."

Old Jack didn't speak. His gloomy eyes were fixed upon the youth.

"What's more, I don't feel I can do myself justice with Miss Mendoza out of the cast," said Reggie. "I really don't! I feel most awfully, terribly nervous, and it's difficult to express one's personality when one's awfully, terribly nervous. In fact," he said recklessly, "I'm not inclined to go on with the picture unless Miss Mendoza returns."

She shot a grateful glance at him and then turned with a slow smile to the silent Jack.

"Would you like me to start today?"

"Not today or any other day," roared the old director, his eyes flaming. "As for you, you nut-fed chorus boy, if you try to let me down I'll blacklist you at every studio in this country, and every time I meet you I'll kick you from here to Halifax!"

He came stamping into the office, where Michael had preceded him, a raging fury of a man.

"What do you think of that?" he asked when he calmed down. "That's the sort of stuff they try to get past you! He's going to quit in the middle of a picture! Did you hear him? That sissy boy—that mouse! Say, Brixan, would you like to play opposite this girl of mine? You can't be worse than Connolly, and it would fill in your time while you're looking for The Head-hunter."

Michael shook his head slowly.

"No, thank you," he said. "That is not my job. And as for The Head-hunter"—he lit a cigarette and sent a ring of smoke to the ceiling—"I know who he is, and I can lay my hands on him just when I want."

## CHAPTER XIV

### MENDOZA MAKES A FIGHT

THE director stared at him in amazement. "You're joking!" he said.

"On the contrary, I am very much in earnest," said Michael quietly. "But to know The Head-hunter and to bring his crimes home to him are quite different matters."

Jack Knebworth sat at his desk, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, a look of blank incredulity on the face turned to the detective.

"Is it one of my company?" he asked, troubled, and Michael laughed.

"I haven't the pleasure of knowing all your company," he said diplomatically, "but, at any rate, don't let The Head-hunter worry you. What are you going to do about Mr. Reggie Connolly?"

Jack shrugged. "He doesn't mean it, and I was a fool to get wild," he said. "That kind of ninny never means anything. You wouldn't dream, to see him on the screen, full of tenderness and love and manliness, that he's the poor

little jellyfish he is! As for Mendoza," he swept his hands before him, and the gesture was significant.

Miss Stella Mendoza, however, was not accepting her dismissal so readily. She had fought her way up from nothing, and she was not prepared to forfeit her position without a struggle. Moreover her position was a serious one. She had money—so much money that she need never work again; for, in addition to her big salary, she enjoyed an income from a source which need not be too closely inquired into. But there was a danger that Knebworth might carry the war into a wider field.

Her first move was to go in search of Adele Leamington who, she learned that morning for the first time, had taken her place. Though she went in a spirit of conciliation, she choked with anger to discover that the girl was occupying the star's dressing room, the room which had always been sacred to Stella Mendoza's use. Infuriated, yet preserving an outward calm, she knocked at the door. That she, Stella Mendoza, should knock at a door rightfully hers, was maddening enough.

Adele was sitting at the bare dressing table, gazing, a little awe-stricken, at the array of mir-



rors, lights, and the vista of dresses down the long alleyway which served as a wardrobe. At the sight of Mendoza she went red.

"Miss Leamington, isn't it?" asked Stella sweetly. "May I come in?"

"Do, please," said Adele, hastily rising.

"Please *do* sit down," said Stella. "It's a very uncomfortable chair, but most of the chairs here are uncomfortable. They tell me you have been 'doubling' for me?"

"Doubling?" said Adele, puzzled.

"Yes, Mr. Knebworth said he was doubling you. You know what I mean. When an artist can't appear they sometimes put in an understudy in scenes where she's not very distinctly shown—long shots."

"But Mr. Knebworth took me close up," said the girl quietly. "I was only in one long shot."

Miss Mendoza masked her anger and sighed.

"Poor old chap! He's very angry with me, and really I oughtn't to annoy him. I'm coming back tomorrow, you know."

The girl went pale.

"It's fearfully humiliating for you, I realize, but, my dear, we've all had to go through that experience. And people in the studio will be very nice to you."

"But it's impossible," said Adele. "Mr. Knebworth told me I was to be in the picture from start to finish."

Mendoza shook her head smilingly.

"You can never believe what these fellows tell you," she said. "He's just told me to be ready to shoot tomorrow morning on the South Downs."

Adele's heart sank. She knew that was the rendezvous, though she was not aware of the fact that Stella Mendoza had procured her information from the disgruntled Mr. Connolly.

"It is humiliating," Stella went on thoughtfully. "If I were you I would go to town and stay away for a couple of weeks, till the whole thing has blown over. I feel very much to blame for your disappointment, my dear, and if money is any compensation——" She opened her bag and, taking out a wad of notes, detached four of them and put them on the table.

"What is this for?" asked Adele coldly.

"Well, my dear, you'll want money for expenses."

"If you imagine I'm going to London without seeing Mr. Knebworth and finding out for myself whether you're speaking the truth——"

Mendoza's face flamed. "Do you suggest

I'm lying?" She had dropped all pretense of friendliness and stood, a veritable virago, her hands on her hips, her dark face thrust down into Adele's.

"I don't know whether you're a liar or whether you are mistaken," said Adele, who was less afraid of this termagant than she had been at the news she had brought. "The only thing I'm perfectly certain about is that for the moment this is my room, and I will ask you to leave it!"

She opened the door, and for a moment she was afraid that the girl would strike her; but the broad-shouldered Irish dresser, a silent, but passionately interested, spectator and audience, interposed her huge bulk and good-humoredly pushed the raging star into the corridor.

"I'll have you out of there!" she screamed across the woman's shoulder. "Jack Knebworth isn't everything in this company! I've got influence enough to fire Knebworth!"

The innuendoes that followed were not good to hear, but Adele Leamington listened in scornful silence. She was only too relieved—for the girl's raging fury was eloquent—to know that she had not been speaking the truth. For one horrible moment Adele had believed her, knowing that Knebworth would not hesitate to sacrifice

her, or any other member of the company if, by so doing, the values of the picture could be strengthened.

Knebworth was alone when his ex-star was announced, and his first instinct was not to see her. Whatever his intentions might have been, she determined his action by appearing in the doorway, just as he was making up his mind what line to take. He fixed her with his gimlet eyes for a second and then, with a jerk of his head, called her in.

"There are many things I admire about you, Stella, and not the least of them is your nerve. But it is no good coming to me with any of that let-by-gones-be-by-gones stuff. You're not appearing in this picture, and maybe you'll never appear in another picture of mine."

"Is that so?" she drawled, sitting down uninvited and taking from her bag a little gold cigarette case.

"You've come in to tell me that you've got influence with a number of people who are financially interested in this corporation," said Jack to her dismay. She wondered if there were telephone communication between the dressing room and the office: then remembered there wasn't.

"I've handled a good many women in my time," he went on, "and I've never had to fire one but she didn't produce the president, vice president, or treasurer and hold them over my head, with their feet ready to kick out my brains! And, Stella, none of those holdups ever got by. People who are financially interested in a company may pass as your friends, but their first interest is the money."

"We'll see if Sir Gregory thinks the same way," she said and Jack Knebworth whistled.

"Gregory Penne, eh? I didn't know you had friends in that quarter. Yes, he is a stockholder in the company, but he doesn't hold enough to make any difference. I guess he told you that he did. And if he held ninety-nine per cent of it, Stella, it wouldn't make any difference to old Jack Knebworth, because old Jack Knebworth's got a contract which gives him a free hand, and the only getting-out clause is the one that gets *me* out! You can't touch me, Stella."

"I suppose you're going to blacklist me?" she said sulkily.

This was the one punishment she most feared—that Jack Knebworth should circulate the story of her unforgivable sin of letting down a picture when it was half shot.

"I thought about that," he nodded, "but I guess I'm not vindictive. I'll let you go and say the part didn't suit you, and that you resigned, which is as near the truth as any story I'll have to repeat."

He waved her out of the office, and she went, somewhat chastened. Outside the studio she met Lawley Foss and told him the result of the interview.

"If it's like that, you can do nothing," he said. "I'd speak for you, Stella, but I've got to speak for myself," he added bitterly. "The idea of a man of my genius truckling hat in hand to this old Yankee is very humiliating."

"You ought to have your own company, Lawley," she said, as she had said a dozen times before. "You write the stuff, and I'll be the leading woman and put it over for you. Why, you could direct Kneb's head off. I *know*, Lawley! I've been to the only place on earth where art is appreciated, and I tell you that a four-flusher like Jack Knebworth wouldn't last a light mile at Hollywood!"

Her voice was emphatic.

"Light mile" was a term she had acquired from a scientific admirer. It had the double advantage of sounding grand and creating a

demand for an explanation. To her annoyance Foss was sufficiently acquainted with elementary physics to know that she meant the period of time that a ray of light would take to traverse a mile.

"Is he in his office now?"

She nodded, and without any further word Lawley Foss, in some trepidation, knocked at his chief's door.

"The truth is, Mr. Knebworth, I want to ask a favor of you."

"Is it money?" demanded Jack, looking up from under his bushy brows.

"Well, it was money, as a matter of fact. There have been one or two little bills I've overlooked, and the bailiffs have been after me. I've got to raise fifty pounds by two o'clock this afternoon."

Jack pulled open a drawer, took out a book, and wrote a check, not for fifty pounds but for eighty.

"That's a month's salary in advance," he said. "You've drawn your pay up to today, and by the terms of your contract you're entitled to one month's notice or pay therefor. You've got it."

Foss went an ugly red.

"Does that mean I'm fired?" he asked loudly. Jack nodded.

"You're fired, not because you want money, not because you're one of the most difficult men on the lot to deal with, but for what you **did** last night, Foss."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I am taking Mr. Brixan's view that you fastened a white label to the window of Miss Leamington's room in order to guide an agent of Sir Gregory Penne. That agent came and nearly kidnaped my leading lady."

The man's lips curled in a sneer.

"You've got melodrama in your blood, Knebworth," he said. "Kidnap your leading lady! That sort of thing may happen in the United States, but it don't happen in England."

"Close the door as you go out," said Jack, preparing for work.

"Let me say this," began Foss. "If you——"

"I'll let you say nothing," snarled Knebworth. "Not even good-by. Get!"

When the door slammed behind his visitor, the old director pushed a bell on his table, and to his assistant who came he said:

"Get Miss Leamington down here. I'd like contact with something **that's** wholesome."



## CHAPTER XV

### TWO FROM THE YARD

CERTAINLY Chichester is not famous for its restaurants, but the dining room of a little hotel, where three people foregathered that afternoon, had the advantage of privacy. When Mike Brixan got back to his hotel he found two men waiting to see him; and, after a brief introduction, he took them upstairs to his sitting room.

"I'm glad you've come," he said, when the inspector had closed the door behind him. "The fact is that sheer criminal work is a novelty to me, and I'm afraid that I'm going to make it a mystery to you," he smiled. "At the moment I'm not prepared to give expression to all my suspicions."

Detective Inspector Lyle, the chief of the two, laughed.

"We have been placed entirely under your orders, Captain Brixan," he said, "and neither of us is very curious. The information you asked for, Sergeant Walters has brought." He indicated his tall companion.

"Which information—about Penne? Is he known to the police?" asked Michael, interested.

Sergeant Walters nodded.

"He was convicted and fined a few years ago for assaulting a servant—a woman. Apparently he took a whip to the girl, and he very narrowly escaped going to prison. That was the first time our attention was attracted to him, and we made inquiries both in London and in the Malay States, and we found out all about him. He's a very rich man, and, being a distant cousin of the late baronet, you may say he fluked his title. In Borneo he lived practically in the bush for fifteen or twenty years, and the stories we have about him aren't particularly savory. There are a few of them which you might read at your leisure, Mr. Brixan. They're in the record."

Michael nodded. "Is anything known of an educated orang-outang which is his companion?"

To his surprise the officer answered:

"Bhag? Oh, yes, we know all about him. He was captured when he was quite a baby by Penne and brought up in captivity. It has been rather difficult to trace the man, because he never returns to England by the usual steamship lines, so that it's almost impossible to have

a tag on him. He has a yacht, a fine, sea-going boat, the *Kipi*, which is practically officered and manned by Papuans. What comes and goes with him I don't know. There was a complaint came through to us that the last time Penne was abroad he nearly lost his life as the result of some quarrel he had with a local tribesman. Now, Mr. Brixan, what would you like us to do?"

Michael's instructions were few and brief. That evening, when Adele walked home to her lodgings, she was conscious that a man was following her, and after her previous night's adventure this fact would have played havoc with her nerves, except for the note she found waiting when she got indoors. It was from Michael.

Would you mind if I put a Scotland Yard man to watch you, to see that you do not get into mischief? I don't think there's any danger that you will, but I shall feel ever so much easier in my mind if you will endure this annoyance.

She read the letter, and her brows knit. So she was being shadowed! It was an uncomfortable experience, and yet she could not very well object, could not indeed feel anything but a sense of warm gratitude toward this ubiquitous and pushful young man who seemed determined not to let her out of his sight.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BROWN MAN FROM NOWHERE

WITH a brand-new grievance against life Lawley Foss gathered his forces to avenge himself upon the world that had treated him so harshly. And first and most powerful of his forces was Stella Mendoza. There was a council of war held in the drawing room of the pretty little house that Stella had taken when she joined the Knebworth Corporation. The third of the party was Mr. Reggie Connolly. And, as they were mutually sympathetic, so were they mutually unselfish—characteristically so. This was evident.

"We've been treated disgracefully by Knebworth, Mr. Foss, especially you. I think, compared with your case, mine is nothing."

"It is the way he has handled you that makes me sore," said Foss energetically. "An artist of your standing!"

"The work you've done for him! And Reggie—he treated him like a dog!"

"Personally it doesn't matter to me," said

Reggie. "I can always find a contract. It's you——"

"For the matter of that, we can all find contracts," interrupted Stella, with a taste of acid in her voice. "I can have my own company when I please, and I've got two directors mad to direct me, and two men I know would put up every cent of money to give me my own company—at least they'd put up a lot. And Chauncy Seller is raving to play opposite me, and you know what a star he is; and he'd let me be featured and go into small type himself. He's a lovely man and the best juvenile in this country or any other."

Mr. Connolly coughed.

"The point is, can we get the money *now*?" asked Foss, practical for once.

There was no immediate and enthusiastic assurance from the girl.

"Because, if not, I think I can get all I want," said Foss surprisingly. "I won't say from whom, or how I'm going to get it; but I'm certain I can get big money, and it will be easier to get it for some specific object than to ask for it myself."

"Less risky?" suggested Connolly, with a desire to be in the conversation.

It was an unfortunate remark, the more so since by chance he had hit the nail on the head. Foss went a dull red.

"What do you mean by 'less risky?'" he demanded.

Poor Reggie had meant nothing, and he admitted as much in some haste. He had meant to be helpful, and now he was ready to sulk at the storm he had aroused; more ready because, as the conversation had progressed, he had faded more and more into the background as an inconsiderable factor. There is nothing quite so disheartening to a conspirator as to find the conspiring taken out of his hands, and Reggie Connolly felt it was the moment to make a complete *volte face* and incidentally assert what he was pleased to call his "personality."

"This is all very well, Stella," he said, "but it looks to me as if I'm going to be left out in the cold. What with your thinking about Chauncy Seller—he's spoiled more pictures than any two men I know—and all that sort of thing, I don't see that I'm going to be much use to you. I don't really. I know you'll think I'm a fearful awful rotter, but I feel that we owe something to old Jack Kneb—I do really. I've jeopardized my position for your sake, and I'm pre-

pared to do anything in reason, but what with pulling Chauncy Seller—who is a bounder of the worst kind—into your cast, and what with Foss jumping down my throat, well, really——”

They were not inclined to mollify him, having rather an eye to the future than to the present, and he had retired in a huff before the girl realized that the holding of Reggie would at least have embarrassed Knebworth to the extent of forcing a retake of those parts of the picture in which he appeared.

“Never mind about Connolly. The picture is certain to fail with that extra; she’s bad. I have a friend in London,” explained Foss, after the discussion returned to the question of ways and means, “who can put up the money. I’ve got a sort of pull with him. In fact—well, anyhow, I’ve got a pull. I’ll go up tonight and see him.”

“And I’ll see mine,” said Stella. “We’ll call the company the Stella Mendoza Picture Corporation.”

Lawley Foss demurred. He was inclined to another title, but he was prepared to accept as a compromise the Foss-Mendoza Company, a compromise agreeable to Stella provided the names were reversed.

"Who is Brixan?" she asked, as Foss was leaving.

"He is a detective."

She opened her eyes wide. "A detective? What is he doing here?"

Lawley Foss smiled contemptuously. "He is trying to discover what no man of his mental caliber will ever discover. The Head-hunter. I am the one man in the world who could help him. Instead of which," he smiled again, "I am helping myself."

With which cryptic and mystifying statement he left her.

Stella Mendoza was an ambitious woman, and when ambition is directed toward wealth and fame it is not attended by scruple. After Foss had gone, she went up to her room to change. It was too early to make the call she intended, for Sir Gregory did not like to see her during the daytime. He, who had not hesitated to send Bhag on a fantastic mission, was a stickler for the proprieties.

Having some letters to post, she drove into Chichester late in the afternoon and saw Mike Brixan in peculiar circumstances. He was the center of a little crowd near the market cross, a head above the surrounding people. There was



a policeman present; she saw his helmet and for a moment was inclined to satisfy her curiosity.

She changed her mind, and when she returned the crowd had dispersed, and Michael had disappeared, too. Driving home, she wondered whether the detective had been engaged professionally.

Mike himself had been attracted by the crowd which was watching the ineffectual efforts of a Sussex policeman to make himself intelligible to a shock-haired, brown-faced native, an incongruous figure in an ill-fitting suit of store clothes and a derby hat which was a little too large for him. In his hand he carried a bundle tied up in a bright green handkerchief, and under his arm was a long object wrapped in linen and fastened with innumerable strings. At the first sight of him Michael thought it was one of Penne's Malaysian servants, but on second thought he realized that Sir Gregory would not allow any of his slaves to run loose about the countryside. Pushing his way through the crowd, he came up to the policeman, who touched his helmet and grinned.

"Can't make head or tail of this fellow's lingo, sir," he said. "He wants to know something,

but I can't make out what. He has just come into the city."

The brown man turned his big dark eyes upon Mike and said something which was Greek to the detective. There was a curious dignity about the native that even his ludicrous garments could not wholly dissipate, an erectness of body, a carriage of head, an imponderable air of greatness that instantly claimed Michael Brixan's attention.

Then suddenly Mike had an inspiration and addressed the man in Dutch. Immediately the native's eyes lit up.

"*Ja, mynheer*, I speak Dutch."

Mike had guessed that he came from Malaysia, where Dutch and Portuguese are spoken by the better class natives.

"I am from Borneo, and I seek a man who is called Truji, an Englishman. No, *mynheer*. I wish to see his house, for he is a great man in my country. When I have seen his house I will go back to Borneo."

Mike was watching him, as he talked. It was a particularly good-looking face, except for the long and ugly scar that ran from his forehead to the point of his jaw. A new servant for Gregory Penne, thought the detective, and he gave him

directions. Standing by the policeman's side, he watched the queer figure with its bundles till it disappeared.

"Queer language, sir," said the officer. "It was Dutch to me."

"And to me," chuckled Mike and continued on his way to the hotel.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MR. FOSS MAKES A SUGGESTION

IMMERSED in her beloved script, Adele Leamington sat on her bed, a box of marron glacé by her side, her knees tucked up, and a prodigious frown on her forehead. Try as hard as she would, she found it impossible to concentrate upon the intricate directions with which Foss invariably tortured the pages of his scenarios. Ordinarily she could have mastered this handicap, but, for some reason or other, individual thoughts which belonged wholly to her and had no association with her art, came floating in such volume that the lines were meaningless, and the page, for all the instruction it gave to her might as well have been blank.

What *was* Michael Brixan? He was not her idea of a detective, and why was he staying in Chichester? Could it be—— She flushed at the thought and was angry with herself. It was hardly likely that a man who was engaged in unraveling a terrible crime, would linger for the sake of being near to her. Was The Head-

hunter, the murderer, living near Chichester? She dropped her manuscript to her knees at the appalling thought.

The voice of her landlady aroused her.

"Will you see Mr. Foss, Miss?"

She jumped up from the bed and opened the door.

"Where is he?"

"I've put him in the parlor," said the woman who had grown a little more respectful of late. Possibly the rise of the extra to stardom was generally known in that small town which took an interest in the fortunes of its one ewe lamb of a production company.

Lawley Foss was standing by the window, looking out, when she came into the room.

"Good afternoon, Adele," he said genially. He had never called her by her Christian name before, even if he had known it.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Foss," she said with a smile. "I'm sorry to hear that you have left us."

Foss lifted his shoulders in a gesture of indifference.

"The scope was a little too limited for my kind of work," he said.

He was wondering if Mike had told her about

the disk of paper on her window, and he surmised rightly that he had not. Foss himself **did** not attach any significance to the white disk, accepting Gregory's explanation, which **was** that, liking the girl, he wished to toss some flowers and a present, by way of a peace offering, through a window which he guessed **would** be open. Foss had thought him a love-sick fool and had obliged him. The story that Knebworth had told, Foss dismissed as sheer melodrama.

"Adele, you're a foolish little girl to turn down a man like Gregory Penne," he said, and he saw by her face that he was on dangerous ground. "There's no sense in getting up in the air; after all we're human beings, and it isn't unnatural that Penne should have a crush on you. There's nothing wrong in that. Hundreds of girls have dinner with men without there being anything sinister in it. I'm a friend of Penne's, in a way, and I'm seeing him tonight on a very important and personal matter. Will you come along?"

She shook her head.

"There may be no harm in it," she said, "but there is no pleasure in it, either."

"He's a rich and powerful man," said Foss impressively. "He could be of service to you."

Again she shook her head at his suggestions.

"I want no other help than my own ability," she said. "I nearly said 'genius,' but that would have sounded like conceit. I do not need the patronage of any rich man. If I cannot succeed without that, then I am a hopeless failure and am content to be one!"

Still Foss lingered.

"I think I can manage without you," he said, "but I'd have been glad of your coöperation. He's crazy about you. If Mendoza knew that, she'd kill you!"

"Miss Mendoza?" gasped the girl. "But why? Does she know him?"

"Yes; but very few people are aware of the fact. There was a time when he'd have done anything for her, and she was a wise girl; she let him help! Mendoza has money to burn and diamonds enough to fill the Jewel House."

Adele listened, horror-stricken, incredulous, and then he hastened to insure himself against Stella's wrath.

"You needn't tell her I told you; this is in strict confidence. I don't want to get on the wrong side of Penne, either," he shivered. "That man's a devil!"

Her lips twitched.

"And yet you calmly ask me to dine with **him** and hold out the bait of Miss Mendoza's **diamonds!**"

"I suppose you think she's awful," he sneered.

"I am very sorry for her," said the girl quietly, "and I am determined not to be sorry for **myself!**"

She opened the door to him in silence, and in silence he took his departure. After all, he thought, there was no need for any outside help. In his breast pocket was a sheet of manuscript, written on The Head-hunter's typewriter. That ought to be worth thousands when he made **his** revelation.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FACE IN THE PICTURE

ON the strip of path before his untidy house Mr. Sampson Longvale was taking a gentle constitutional. He wore, as usual—for he was a creature of habit—a long, gray silk dressing gown, fastened by a scarlet sash. On his head was his silk nightcap, and between his teeth was a clay church-warden pipe, which he puffed solemnly, as he walked. He was evidently enjoying it.

He had just bidden a courteous good night to the help who came in daily to tidy his living rooms and prepare his simple meals, when he heard the sound of feet coming up the drive. He thought at first it was the woman returning—she had a habit of forgetting things—but when he turned he saw the unprepossessing figure of a neighbor with whom he was acquainted in the sense that Sir Gregory Penne had twice been abominably rude to him.

The old man watched with immobile countenance the coming of his unwelcome visitor.

"Evening!" growled Penne. "Can I speak to you privately?"

Mr. Longvale inclined his head courteously.

"Certainly, Sir Gregory. Will you come in?"

He ushered the owner of Griff Towers into the long sitting room and lit the candles. Sir Gregory glanced around, his lip curled in disgust, at the worn poverty of the apartment, and when the old man had pushed up a chair for him it was some time before he accepted the offer.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Longvale courteously, "to what circumstance do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"You had some actors staying here the other day?"

Mr. Longvale inclined his head.

"There was some fool talk about a monkey of mine trying to get into the house."

"A monkey?" said Mr. Longvale in gentle surprise. "That is the first I have heard of monkeys."

Which was true. The other looked at him suspiciously.

"Is that so?" he asked. "You're not going to persuade me you didn't hear?"

The old man stood up, a picture of dignity.

"Do you suggest that I am lying, sir?" he said.

"Because, if you do, there is the door! And though it hurts me to be in the least degree discourteous to a guest of mine, I am afraid I have no other course than to ask you to leave my house."

"All right, all right," said Sir Gregory Penne impatiently. "Don't lose your temper, my friend. I didn't come to see you about that, anyway. You're a doctor, aren't you?"

Mr. Longvale was obviously startled.

"I practiced medicine when I was younger," he said.

"Poor, too?" Gregory looked round. "You haven't a shilling in the world, I'll bet!"

"There you are wrong," said old Mr. Longvale quietly. "I am an extremely wealthy man, and the fact that I do not keep my house in repair is due to a curious penchant of mine for decaying things. That is an unhealthy, probably a morbid predilection of mine. How did you know I was a doctor?"

"I heard through one of my servants. You set the broken finger of a carter."

"I haven't practiced for years," said Mr. Longvale. "I almost wish I had," he added wistfully. "It is a noble science."

"Anyway," interrupted Penne, "even if you

can't be bought, you're a secretive old devil, and that suits me. There's a girl up at my house who is very ill. I don't want any of these prying country doctors nosing around my private affairs. Would you be willing to come along and see her?"

The old man pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"I should be most happy," he said, "but I am afraid my medical science is a little rusty. Is she a servant?"

"In a way," said the other shortly. "When can you come?"

"I'll come at once," said Mr. Longvale gravely, and he went out to return in his great-coat.

The baronet looked at the ancient garment with a smile of derision.

"Why the devil do you wear such old-fashioned clothes?" he asked.

"To me they are very new," said the old man gently. "The garments of today are without romance, without the thrill which these bring to me." He patted the overlapping cape and smiled. "An old man is entitled to his fancies; let me be humored, Sir Gregory."

At the moment Mr. Sampson Longvale was driving to Griff Towers, Mike Brixan, sum-

moned by messenger, was facing Jack Knebworth in his office.

"I hope you didn't mind my sending for you, though it was a fool thing to do," said the director. "You remember that we shot some scenes at Griff Towers?"

Michael nodded.

"I want you to see one that we took, with the tower in the background, and tell me what you think of—something."

Wonderingly, Michael accompanied the director to the projection room.

"My laboratory manager pointed it out to me in the negative," explained Jack, as they seated themselves, and the room went dark. "Of course I should have seen it in the print."

"What is it?" asked Michael curiously.

"That's just what I don't know," said the other, scratching his head, "but you'll see for yourself."

Michael heard a flicker and a furious clicking, and then there appeared on the small screen used for projection purposes a picture of two people. Adele was one, and Reggie Connolly the other, and Michael gazed stolidly, though with rising annoyance, at a love scene which was being enacted between the two.

In the immediate background was the wall of the tower, and Michael saw for the first time that there was a little window which he did not remember having seen from the interior of the hall; it was particularly dark and was lighted even in daytime by electric lamps.

"I never noticed that window before," he said.

"It's the window I want you to watch," said Jack Knebworth, and, even as he spoke, there came stealthily into view a face.

At first it was indistinct and blurred, but later it came into focus. It was the oval face of a girl, dark-eyed, her hair in disorder, a look of unspeakable terror on her face. She raised her hand, as if to beckon somebody—probably Jack himself, who was directing the picture. That, at least, was Jack's view. They had hardly time to get accustomed to the presence of the mystery girl when she disappeared with such rapidity as to suggest that she had been dragged violently back.

"What do you make of that?" asked Knebworth.

Michael bit his lip thoughtfully.

"Looks almost as though friend Penne had a prisoner in his dark tower. Of course! The

woman whose scream I heard, and who, he said, was a servant! But the window puzzles me. There's no sign of it inside. The stairway leads out of the hall, but in such a position that it is impossible that the girl could have been standing either on the stairs or the landing. Therefore there must be a fifth wall inside, containing a separate staircase. Does this mean you will have to retake?"

Jack shook his head.

"No, we can black her out; she's only on fifty feet of film; but I thought you'd like to see it."

The lights came on again, and they went back to the director's office.

"I don't like Penne, for more reasons than one," said Jack Knebworth. "I like him less since I've found that he's better friends with Mendoza than I thought he was."

"Who is Mendoza—the deposed star?"

The other nodded.

"Stella Mendoza, not a bad girl and not a good girl," he said. "I've been wondering why Penne always gave us permission to use his grounds for shooting, and now I know. I tell you that house holds a few secrets!"

Michael smiled faintly.

"One, at least, of them will be revealed to-

night," he said. "I am going to explore Griff Towers and I do not intend asking permission of Sir Gregory Penne. And if I can discover what I believe is there to be discovered, Gregory Penne will sleep under lock and key this night!"



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE MIDNIGHT VISIT

FROM town Michael Brixan had had sent down to him a heavy suit case, but it contained precious little clothing. He was busy with its contents for half an hour when the boots of the hotel announced the arrival of the motorcycle that had been hired for him.

With a canvas bag strapped to his back, Michael mounted the machine and was soon clear of the town, swerving through the twisting lanes of Sussex until he arrived at Dower House, behind which he concealed his machine.

It was eleven o'clock when he crossed the fields to the postern gate, on the alert all the time for the soft-footed Bhag. The postern was closed and locked, a contingency for which he was prepared. Unstrapping his bag, he took therefrom a bundle of rods and screwed three together. To the top he fastened a big, blunt hook, and, replacing the remainder of the rods, he lifted the hook till it rested on the top of the high wall, tested its stability, and in a few sec-

onds had climbed his "ladder" and had jumped to the other side.

He followed the path that he had taken before, keeping close to the bushes, and all the time watching left and right for Penne's monstrous servant. As he came to the end of the hedge, the hall door opened, and two men came out. One was Penne, and for a moment he did not recognize the tall man by his side, until he heard the voice of Mr. Sampson Longvale!

"I think she will be all right. The wounds are very peculiar. It looks almost as if she had been scratched by some huge claw," said Longvale. "I hope I have been of assistance, Sir Gregory, though, as I told you, it is nearly fifty years since I engaged in medical work."

So old Longvale had been a doctor! Somehow this news did not surprise Michael. There was something in the old man's benevolence of countenance and easy manner which would have suggested a training in that profession to one even less analytical than Michael Brixan.

"My car will take you down," he heard Sir Gregory say.

"No, no, thank you; I will walk. It is not very far. Good night, Sir Gregory."

The baronet growled a good night and went

back into the dimly lit hall, and Michael heard the rattle of chains, as the door was fastened.

There was no time to be lost. Almost before Mr. Sampson Longvale had disappeared into the darkness, Michael had opened his canvas bag and had screwed on three more links to his ladder. From each rod projected a short, light, steel bracket. It was the type of hook ladder that firemen use, and Michael had employed this method of gaining entrance to a forbidden house many times in his career.

He judged the distance accurately; for when he lifted the rod and dropped the hook upon the sill of the little window, the ladder hung only a few inches short of the ground. With a tug to test the hook, he went up, hand over hand, and in a few seconds was prying at the window sash. It needed little pressure, for the catch was of elementary simplicity, and in another instant he was standing on the step of a dark and narrow stairway. He had provided himself with an electric torch, and he flashed a beam up and down. Below he saw a small door which apparently led into the hall, and by an effort of memory he remembered that in the corner of the hall he had seen a curtain hanging without attaching any importance to the fact. Going down he

tried the door and found it locked. Putting down his lantern he took out a leather case of tools and began to manipulate the lock. In an incredibly short space of time the key turned. When he had assured himself that the door would open he was satisfied. For the moment his work lay upstairs, and he climbed the steps again, coming to a narrow landing, but no door.

A second, a third, and a fourth flight brought him, as near as he could guess, to the top of the tower, and here he found a narrow exit. Listening, after a while he heard somebody moving about the room. Apparently the person wore slippers. Presently a door closed with a thud, and he tried the handle of the wicket. It was unlocked, and he opened it gently a fraction of an inch at a time, until he secured a view of the greater part of the chamber.

It was a small, lofty room, unfurnished, with the exception of a low bed in one corner, on which a woman lay. Her back was toward him fortunately; but the black hair and the ivory yellow of the bare arm that lay on the coverlet told him that she was not European.

Presently she turned, and he saw her face, recognizing her immediately as the woman whose face he had seen in the picture. She

was pretty in her wild way, and young. Her eyes were closed, and presently she began crying softly in her sleep.

Michael was halfway into the room when he saw the handle of the other door turn, and, quick as a flash, he stepped back into the darkness of the landing.

It was Bhag, in his old blue overalls, a tray of food in his great hands. He reached out his foot and pulled the table toward him, placing the viands by the side of the bed. The girl opened her eyes and sank back with a little cry of disgust; and Bhag, who was evidently used to these demonstrations of her loathing, shuffled out of the room.

Again Michael pushed the door and crossed the room, unnoticed by the girl, looking out into the passage—not six feet away from him Bhag was squatting, glaring in his direction. Michael closed the door quickly and flew back to the secret staircase, pulling the door behind him. He felt for a key, but there was none, and, without wasting another second, he ran down the stairs. The one thing he wished to avoid was an encounter which would betray his presence in the house.

He made no attempt to get out of the win-

dow, but continued his way to the foot of the stairs and passed through into the hall. This time he was able to close the door, for there were two large bolts at the top and the bottom. Pulling aside the curtain, he stepped gingerly into the hall. For a while he waited and presently heard the shuffle of feet on the stairs and a sniff beneath the door.

His first act was to insure his retreat. Noiselessly he drew the bolts from the front door, slipped off the chain, and turned the key. Then noiselessly he made his way along the corridor toward Sir Gregory's room.

The danger was that one of the native servants would see him, but this he must risk. He had observed on each of his previous visits that, short of the library, a door opened into what he knew must be an anteroom of some kind. It was unlocked and he stepped into complete darkness. Groping along the wall, he found a row of switches and pulled down the first. This lit two wall brackets, sufficient to give him a general view of the apartment.

It was a small drawing-room, apparently unused, for the furniture was sheeted with holland, and the grate was empty. From here it was possible to gain access to the library through a

door near the window. He switched off the light, locked the door on the inside, and tried the shutters. These were fastened by iron bars and were not, as in the case of the library, locked. He pulled them back, let the blind up, and gingerly raised a window. His second line of retreat was now prepared, and he could afford to take risks.

Kneeling down he looked through the keyhole. The library was illuminated, and somebody was talking. A woman! Turning the handle he opened the door a fraction of an inch and had a view of the interior.

Gregory Penne was standing in his favorite attitude, with his back to the fire, and before him was a tray of those refreshments without which life was apparently insupportable. Seated on the low settee, drawn up at one side of the fireplace, was Stella Mendoza. She was wearing a fur coat, for the night was chilly, and about her neck was such a sparkle of gems as Michael had never seen before on a woman.

Evidently the discussion was not a pleasant one, for there was a heavy scowl on Gregory's face, and Stella did not seem too pleased.

"I left you because I had to leave you," growled the man, answering some complaint she

had made. "One of my servants is ill, and I brought in the doctor. But, if I had stayed, it would have been the same. It's no good, my girl," he said harshly. "The goose doesn't lay golden eggs more than once—this goose doesn't, at any rate. You were a fool to quarrel with Knebworth."

She said something which did not quite reach Michael's ears.

"I dare say your own company would be fine," said Penne sarcastically. "It would be fine for me who footed the bill, and finer for you who spent the money! No, Stella, that cat doesn't jump. I've been very good to you, and you've no right to expect me to bankrupt myself to humor your whims."

"It's not a whim," she said vehemently, "it's a necessity. You don't want to see me going round the studios taking any kind of a job I can get, do you, Gregory?" she pleaded.

"I don't want to see you work at all, and there's no reason why you should. You've enough to live on. Anyway, you've got nothing ainst Knebworth. If it hadn't been for him, u wouldn't have met me, and if you hadn't met me you'd have been poorer by thousands. You want a change."



There was a silence. Her head was drooped, and Michael could not see the girl's face, but when she spoke there was that note of viciousness in her voice which told him her state of mind.

"You want a change, too, perhaps! I could tell things about you that wouldn't look good in print, and you'd have a change, too! Get that in your mind, Gregory Penne! I'm not a fool. I've seen things and heard things, and I can put two and two together. You think I want a change, do you? Well, I do! I want friends who aren't murderers."

He sprang at her, his big hand covering her mouth.

"You little devil!" he hissed, and at that instant somebody must have knocked, for he turned to the door and said something in the native dialect.

The answer was inaudible to Michael.

"Listen." Gregory was speaking to the girl in a calmer tone. "Foss is waiting to see me, and I'll discuss this little matter with you afterward."

He released her, and going to his desk, touched the spring that operated the mechanism of the secret door that led to Bhag's quarters.

"Go in there and wait," he said. "I'll not keep you longer than five minutes."

She looked suspiciously at the door which had suddenly opened in the paneling.

"No," she said, "I'll go home. Tomorrow will do. I'm sorry I got rough, Gregory, but you madden me sometimes."

"Go in there!"

He pointed to the den, his face working.

"I'll not!" Her face was white. "You beast, don't you think I know? That is Bhag's den! Oh, you beast!"

His face was horrible to see. It was as though all the foulness in his mind found expression in the demoniacal grimace. Breathless, terrified, the girl stared at him.

"Then go into the little drawing room," he said huskily.

Michael had time to switch out the lights and flatten himself against the wall, when the door of the room was flung open, and the girl was thrust in. "It is dark!" she wailed.

"You'll find the switches!" The door banged.

Michael Brixan was in a dilemma. He could see her figure groping along the wall, and stealthily he moved to avoid her. In doing so he stumbled over a stool

"Who's there?" she screamed. "Gregory! Don't let him touch me, Gregory!"

Again the piercing scream.

Michael leaped past her and through the open window, and, the sound of her shrill agony in his ears, fled along the hedge. Swift as he was, something sped more swiftly in pursuit, a great, twittering something that ran bent double on hands and feet. The detective heard and guessed. From what secret hiding place Bhag had appeared, whether he was in the grounds at the moment Michael jumped, he had no time even to guess. He felt a curious lightness of pocket at that moment and thrust in his hand. His pistol was gone. It must have fallen when he jumped.

He could hear the pad of feet behind him, as he darted at a tangent across the field, blundering over the cabbage rows, slipping in furrows, the great beast growing closer and closer with every check. Ahead of him was the postern. But it was locked, and, even if it had not been, the wall would have proved no obstacle to the ape. The barrier of the wall held Michael. Breathless, turning to face his pursuer, in the darkness he saw the green eyes shining like two evil stars.

## CHAPTER XX

### MICHAEL HAS A VISITOR

**DESPERATELY** Detective Michael Brixan braced himself for the supreme and futile struggle. And then to his amazement the ape stopped, and his bird noise became a harsh chatter. Raising himself erect, he beat quickly on his great hairy chest, and the sound of the hollow drumming was awful.

Yet through that sound and above it Michael heard a curious hiss; it was like the faint note of escaping steam, and he looked round. On the top of the wall squatted a man, and Michael knew him at once. It was the brown-faced stranger he had seen that day in Chichester. Michael was surprised at the apparition in such a place.

The drumming and the hissing grew louder, and then Michael saw a bright, curved thing in the brown man's hand. It was a sword, the replica of that which hung above Sir Gregory's fireplace.

He was still wondering when the brown man dropped lightly to the ground, and Bhag, with a

squeal that was almost human, turned and fled. Michael watched the thing, fascinated, until it disappeared into the darkness of the countryside.

"My friend," said Michael in Dutch, "you came at a good moment."

He turned, but the brown man had vanished as though the earth had swallowed him. Shading his eyes against the starlight, he presently discerned a dark shape moving swiftly in the shadow of the wall. For a second he was inclined to follow and question the brown man, but he decided upon another course. With some difficulty he surmounted the wall and dropped to the other side. Then, tidying himself as well as he could, he made the long circuit to the gate of Griff Towers and boldly walked up to the house, whistling as he went.

There was nobody in sight, as he crossed the "parade ground," and his first step was to search for and find his pistol. He must know that the girl was safe before he left the place. He had seen her car waiting on the road outside. His hand was raised to the bell when he heard footsteps in the hall, and he listened intently; there was no doubt that one of the voices was Stella Mendoza's, and he drew back again to cover.

The girl came out, followed by Sir Gregory, and from their tone a stranger, unacquainted with the circumstances of their meeting, might have imagined that the visit had been a very ordinary one, in spite of the lateness of the hour.

"Good night, Sir Gregory," said the girl, almost sweetly. "I will see you tomorrow."

"Come to lunch," said Gregory's voice, "and bring your friend. Shall I walk with you to the car?" He added the question insinuatingly.

"No, thank you," she said hastily.

Michael watched her till she was out of sight, but long before then the big door of Griff Towers had closed, and the familiar rattle of chains told him that it was closed finally.

Where was Foss? He must have gone earlier, if Foss it was. Michael waited till all was quiet, and then, tiptoeing across the gravel, followed the girl. He looked about for the little brown man, but he was not in sight. And then he remembered that he had left the hook ladder hanging to the window on the stairs, and he went back to retrieve it. He found the ladder, as it had been left, unscrewed and packed it in the canvas bag, and five minutes later he was taking his motorcycle from its place of concealment.

A yellow light showed in the window of Mr. Longvale's dining room, and Michael had half a mind to call upon him. He could tell him, at any rate, something of that oval-faced girl in the upper room of the tower. Instead, he decided to go home. He was tired with the night's work, a little disappointed. The tower had not revealed as tremendous a secret as he had hoped. The girl was obviously a prisoner; she had been kidnapped and brought to England on Sir Gregory's yacht.

Such things had happened; there had been a case in the courts on curiously parallel lines only a few months before. At any rate it did not seem worth while to put off going to bed.

He had a hot bath, made himself some chocolate, and, before retiring, sat down to sum up his day's experience. And in the light of recent happenings he was less confident that his first solution of The Head-hunter mystery was the correct one. And the more he thought the less satisfied he was, till at last, in sheer disgust at his own vacillation of mind, he turned out the light and went to bed.

He was sleeping peacefully and late the next morning when an unexpected visitor arrived, and Michael sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes.

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"I've either got nightmare or it's Staines," he said.

Major Staines smiled cheerfully.

"You're awake and normal," he said.

"Has anything happened?" asked Michael, springing out of bed.

"Nothing, only there was a late dance last night and an early train this morning, and I decided to atone for my frivolity by coming down and seeing how far you had got in the Elmer case."

"Elmer case?" Michael frowned. "Good Lord! I'd almost forgotten poor Elmer!"

"Here's something to remind you," said Staines.

He fished from his pocket a newspaper cutting. Michael took it and read:

Is your trouble of mind or body incurable? Do you hesitate on the brink of the abyss? Does courage fail you? Write to Benefactor, Box —

"What is this?" asked Michael, frowning.

"It was found in the pocket of an old waistcoat that Elmer was wearing a few days before he disappeared. Mrs. Elmer was going through his clothes with the idea of selling them, when she found this. It appeared in the *Morning*



*Telegram* of the fourteenth—that is to say, three or four days before Elmer vanished. The box number at the end, of course, is the box number of the newspaper to which replies were sent. There is a record that four letters reached the 'Benefactor,' who, so far as we have been able to discover, had these particular letters re-addressed to a little shop in Stibbington Street, London. Here they were collected by a woman, evidently of the working class, and probably a charwoman, from the appearance which has been circulated. Beyond that no further trace has been obtainable. Similar advertisements have been found by search in other newspapers, but in these cases the letters were sent to an accommodation address in South London, where apparently the same woman collected them. With every new advertisement the advertiser changes his address. She was a stranger to each neighborhood, by the way; and, from what shopkeepers have told Scotland Yard, she seemed to be a little off her head, for she was in the habit of mumbling and talking to herself. Her name is Stivins—at least that is the name she always gave. And the notes she brought were usually signed 'Mark'—that is to say, the notes authorizing the shopkeepers to hand the

letters to her. That she is a native of London there is no doubt, but so far the police have not trailed her."

"And suppose they do?" asked Michael. "Do you connect the advertisement with the murders?"

"We do, and we do not," replied the other. "I merely point out that this advertisement is a peculiar one, and under the circumstances a little suspicious. Now what is the theory you wanted to give me?"

For an hour Michael spoke, interrupted at intervals by questions which Staines put to him.

"It's a queer idea, almost a fantastical one," said Staines gravely, "but if you feel that you've got so much as one thread in your hands, go right ahead. To tell you the truth," in a burst of confidence, "I had a horrible feeling that you had fallen down; and, since I do not want our department to be a source of amusement to Scotland Yard, I thought I'd come along and give you the result of my own private investigations. I agree with you," he said later, as they sat at breakfast, "that you want to go very, very carefully. It is a delicate business. You haven't told the Scotland Yard men your suspicions?"

Michael shook his head.

"Then don't," said the other emphatically. "They'd be certain to put the person you suspect under arrest, and probably that would destroy the evidence that would convict. You say you have made a search of the house?"

"Not a search; I've made a rough inspection."

"Are there cellars?"

"I should imagine so," said Michael. "That type of house usually has."

"Outhouses where——"

Michael shook his head. "There are none, so far as I have been able to see."

Michael walked down to the railway station with his chief, who told him he was leaving in a much more cheerful frame of mind than he had been in when he arrived.

"There's one warning I'll give to you, Mike," said Staines, as the train was about to pull out of the station, "and it is to watch out for yourself! You're dealing with a ruthless and ingenious man. For heaven's sake do not underrate his intelligence. I don't want to wake up one morning to learn that you have vanished from the ken of man."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE ERASURE

**HIS** way back did not take Michael through the little street where Adele Leamington lived—at least not his nearest road. Yet he found himself knocking at the door and learned, with a sense of disappointment, that the girl had been out since seven o'clock in the morning. Knebworth was shooting on the South Downs, and the studio, when he arrived, was empty, except for Knebworth's secretary and the new scenario editor, who had arrived late on the previous evening.

"I don't know the location, Mr. Brixan," said Dicker, the secretary, "but it's somewhere above Arundel. Miss Mendoza was here this morning, asking the same question. She wanted Miss Leamington to go out to lunch with her."

"Oh, she did, did she?" said Michael softly. "Well, if she comes again, you can tell her from me that Miss Leamington has another engagement."

The other nodded wisely. "I hope she won't keep you waiting," he said. "You never know, when Jack's on location——"

"I did not say she had an engagement with me," said Michael loudly.

"That reminds me, Mr. Brixan," said the secretary suddenly. "Do you remember the fuss you made—I mean, there was—about a sheet of manuscript that by some accident had got into Miss Leamington's script?"

Michael nodded. "Has the manuscript been found?" he asked.

"No, but the new scenario editor tells me that he was looking through the book where Foss kept a record of all the manuscripts that came in, and he found one entry had been blacked out with India ink."

"I'd like to see that book," said the interested Michael, and it was brought to him, a large foolscap ledger, ruled to show the name of the submitted scenario, the author, his address, the date received, and the date returned. Mike put it down on the table in Knebworth's private office and went carefully through the list of authors.

"If he sent one he has probably sent more," he said. "There are no other erasures?"

The secretary shook his head. "That is the only one we've seen," he said. "You'll find lots of names of local people. There isn't a tradesman in the place who hasn't written a scenario or submitted an idea since we've been operating."

Slowly Michael's finger went up the column of names. Page after page was turned back. And then his finger stopped at an entry.

"'The Power of Fear,' by Sir Gregory Penne," he read and looked round at Dicker.

"Did Sir Gregory submit scenarios, Mr. Dicker?"

Dicker nodded. "Yes, he sent in one or two," he said. "You'll find his name farther back in the book. He used to write scenarios which he thought were suitable for Miss Mendoza. He's not the man you're looking for?"

"No," said Michael quickly. "Have you any of his manuscripts?"

"They were all sent back," said Dicker regretfully. "He wrote awful mush! I read one of them. I remember Foss trying to persuade old Jack to produce it. Foss made quite a lot of money on the side, we've discovered. He used to take fees from authors, and Mr. Knebworth discovered this morning that he once took two

hundred pounds from a lady on the promise that he'd get her into the pictures. He wrote Foss a stinging letter this morning about it."

Presently Michael found Sir Gregory's name again. It was not so remarkable that the owner of Griff Towers should have submitted a manuscript. He closed the book and handed it back to Dicker.

"It is certainly queer, that erased entry. I'll speak to Foss about it as soon as I can find him," he said.

He went immediately to the little hotel where Foss was staying, but he was out.

"I don't think he came home last night," said the manager. "If he did, he didn't sleep in his bed. He said he was going to London," he added.

Michael went back to the studio, for it had begun to rain, and he knew that that would drive the company from location. His surmise was correct; the big yellow char-à-banc came rumbling into the yard a few minutes after he got there. Adele saw him and was passing with a nod, when he called her to him.

"Thank you, Mr. Brixan, but we lunched on location, and I have two big scenes to read for tomorrow."

Her refusal was uncompromising, but Michael was not the type who readily accepted a "No."

"What about tea? You've got to drink tea, my good lady, though you have fifty scenes to study. And you can't read and eat, too. If you do, you'll get indigestion, and if you get indigestion—"

She laughed. "If my landlady will loan me her parlor, you may come to tea at half past four," she said; "and if you have another engagement at five o'clock, you'll be able to meet it."

Jack Knebworth was waiting for him when he went into the studio.

"Heard about that entry in the scenario book?" he asked. "I see you have. What do you think of it?" Without waiting for a reply: "It looks queer to me. Foss was an unmitigated liar. That fellow couldn't see straight. I've got a little bone to pick with him on the matter of a fee he accepted from a screen-struck lady who wished to be featured in one of my productions."

"How's the girl?" asked Michael.

"You mean Adele? Really, she's wonderful, Brixan! I'm touching wood all the time"—he put his hand on the table piously—"because I know that there's a big shock coming to



me somewhere and somehow. Those things do not happen in real life. The only stars that are born in a night are the fireworks produced by crazy vice presidents who have promised to do something for Mamie and can't break their word. But Adele Leamington is getting over entirely and absolutely by sheer, unadulterated gray matter. I tell you, Brixan, it's not right. These things do not happen except in the imagination of press agents. There's something wrong with that kid."

"Wrong?" said Michael, startled.

Knebworth nodded. "Something radically wrong. There's a snag somewhere. She's either going to let me down by vanishing before the picture's through, or else she's going to be arrested for driving a car along Regent Street in a highly intoxicated condition!"

Michael laughed. "I think she'll do neither," he said.

"Heard about Mendoza's new company?" asked old Jack, filling his pipe.

Michael pulled up a chair and sat down. "No, I haven't."

"She's starting a new production company. There's never a star I've fired that hasn't! It gets all written out on paper, capital in big

type, star in bigger! It's generally due to the friends of the star, who tell her that a hundred thousand a year is a cruel starvation wage for a woman of her genius, and she ought to get it all. Generally there's a sucker in the background who puts up the money."

"Mendoza will not get a good producer in England?"

"She may," nodded Jack. "There *are* producers in this country, but unfortunately they're not the men on top. Come in, Mr. Longvale."

Michael turned. The cheery old man was at the door, hat in hand.

"I am afraid I am rather of a nuisance," he said in his beautiful voice. "But I came in to see my lawyer, and I could not deny myself the satisfaction of calling to see how your picture is progressing."

"It is going on well, Mr. Longvale, thank you," said Jack. "You know Mr. Brixan?"

The old man nodded and smiled. "Yes, I came in to see my lawyer on what to you will seem to be a curious errand. Many years ago I was a medical student and took my final examination, so that I am, to all intents and purposes, a doctor, though I've not practiced to any extent. It is not generally known that I have a

medical degree, and I was surprised last night to be called out by a neighbor who wished me to attend a servant of his. I am so hazy on the subject that I wasn't quite sure whether or not I'd broken the law by practicing without registration."

"I can relieve your mind there, Mr. Longvale," said Michael. "Once you are registered, you are always registered, and you acted quite within your rights."

"So my lawyer informed me," said Longvale gravely.

"Was it a bad case?" asked Michael who guessed who the patient was.

"No, it was not a bad case. I thought there was blood poisoning, but I think perhaps I may have been mistaken. Medical science has made such great advance since I was a young man that I almost feared to prescribe. While I am only too happy to render any service that humanity demands, I must confess that it was rather a disturbing experience, and I scarcely slept all night. In fact it was a very disturbing evening and night. Somebody, for some extraordinary reason, put a motor bicycle in my garden."

Michael smiled to himself.

"I cannot understand why. It had gone this morning. And then I saw our friend Foss, who seemed very much perturbed about something."

"Where did you see him?" asked Michael quickly.

"He was passing my house. I was standing at the gate, smoking my pipe, and bade him good night without knowing who he was. When he turned back, I saw it was Mr. Foss. He told me he had been to make a call, and that he had another appointment in an hour."

"What time was this?" asked Michael.

"I think it must have been eleven o'clock." The old man hesitated. "I'm not sure. It was just before I went to bed."

Michael could easily account for Foss' conduct. Sir Gregory had hurried him off and told him to come back after the girl had gone.

"My little place used to be remarkable for its quietness," said Mr. Longvale, as he shook his head. "Perhaps," turning to Knebworth, "when your picture is finished you will be so good as to allow me to see it?"

"Why surely, Mr. Longvale."

"I don't know why I'm taking this tremendous interest," chuckled the old man. "I must

confess that until a few weeks ago film making was a mystery to me. And even today it belongs to the esoteric sciences."

Dicker thrust his head in the door. "Will you see Miss Mendoza?" he asked.

Jack Knebworth's expression was one of utter weariness.

"No," he said curtly.

"She says—" began Dicker.

Only the presence of the venerable Mr. Longvale prevented Jack from expressing his views on Stella Mendoza and all that she could say.

"There's another person I saw last night," nodded Mr. Longvale. "I thought at first you must be 'shooting'—is that the expression—in the neighborhood, but Mr. Foss told me I was mistaken. She's rather a charming girl, don't you think?"

"Very," said Jack dryly.

"A very sweet disposition," Longvale went on, unconscious of the utter lack of sympathy in the atmosphere. "Nowadays the confusion and hurry which modernity brings in its trail do not make for sweetness of temper, and one is glad to meet an exception. Not that I am an enemy of modernity. To me this is the most delightful phase of my long life."

"Sweet disposition!" almost howled Jack Knebworth when the old man had taken a dignified farewell. "Did you get that, Brixan. Say, if that woman's disposition is sweet, the devil's made of chocolate!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE HEAD

WHEN Mike went out he found Stella at the gate of the studio, and he remembered, seeing her, that she had been invited to lunch at Griff Towers. To his surprise she crossed the road to him.

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Brixan," she said. "I sent in word to find if you were there."

"Then your message was wrongly delivered to Mr. Knebworth," smiled Mike.

She lifted one of her shoulders in demonstration of her contempt for Jack Knebworth and all his works.

"No, it was you I wanted to see. You're a detective, aren't you?"

"I am," said Michael, wondering what was coming next.

"My car is round the corner; will you come to my house?"

Michael hesitated. He was anxious, more than anxious, to speak to Adele, though he had nothing special to tell her, beyond the thing

which he himself did not know, and she could never guess.

"With pleasure," he said.

She was a skillful motorist, and apparently she was so much engrossed in her driving that she did not speak throughout the journey. In the pretty little drawing-room, from which he had a view of the lovely South Downs, he waited expectantly.

"Mr. Brixan, I am going to tell you something which I think you ought to know." Her face was pale, her manner curiously nervous. "I don't know what you will think of me when I have told you, but I've got to risk that. I can't keep silence any longer."

A shrill bell sounded in the hall.

"The telephone. Will you excuse me one moment?"

She hurried out, leaving the door slightly ajar. Michael heard her quick, angry reply to somebody at the other end of the wire, and then a long period of silence, when apparently she listened without comment. It was nearly ten minutes before she returned, and her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed.

"Would you mind if I told you what I was going to tell you a little later?" she asked.



She had been speaking on the telephone to Sir Gregory; of that Michael was sure, though she had not mentioned his name.

"There's no time like the present, Miss Mendoza," he said encouragingly, and she licked her dry lips.

"Yes, I know, but there are reasons why I can't speak now. Would it be possible for you to see me tomorrow?"

"Why, certainly," said Michael, secretly glad of his release.

"Shall I drive you back?"

"No, thank you, I can walk."

"Let me take you to the edge of the town; I'm going that way," she begged.

Of course she was going that way, thought Michael. She was going to Griff Towers. He was so satisfied on this matter that he did not even trouble to inquire, and when she dropped him at his hotel, she hardly waited for him to step to the sidewalk before the car leaped forward on its way.

"There's a telegram for you, sir," said the porter. He went into the manager's office and returned with a buff envelope, which Michael tore open.

For a time he could not comprehend the fate-

ful message the telegram conveyed. And then slowly he read it to himself.

A head found on Chesham Common early this morning. Come to Leatherhead Police Station at once.

STAINES.

An hour later a fast car dropped him before the station. Staines was waiting on the step.

"Found at daybreak this morning," he said. "The man is, so far, unknown."

He led the way to an outhouse. On a table in the center of the room was a box, and he lifted the lid.

Mike took one glance at the waxen face, and turned white.

"Good Lord!" he breathed. It was the head of Lawley Foss.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### CLEWS AT THE TOWER

IN fascinated horror Michael gazed at the tragic spectacle. Then reverently he covered the box with a cloth and walked into the paved courtyard.

"You know him?" asked Staines.

Michael nodded. "Yes, it is Lawley Foss, lately scenario editor of the Knebworth Picture Corporation. He was seen alive last night at eleven o'clock. I myself heard, if I did not see him, somewhere about that time. He was visiting Griff Towers, Sir Gregory Penne's place in Sussex. Was there the usual note?" he asked.

"There was a note, but it was quite unusual."

He showed the typewritten slip; it was in the station inspector's office. One characteristic line, with its ill-aligned letters: "This is the head of a traitor." That and no more.

"I've had the Dorking police on the phone. It was a wet night, and although several cars passed, none of them could be identified."

"Has the advertisement appeared?" asked Michael.

Staines shook his head. "No, that was the first thing we thought of. The newspapers have carefully observed, and every newspaper manager in the country has promised to notify us the moment such an advertisement is inserted. But there has been no advertisement of a suspicious character."

"I shall have to follow the line of probability here," said Michael. "It is clear that this man was murdered between eleven o'clock and three in the morning—probably nearer eleven than three; for, if the murderer is located in Sussex, he would have to bring the head to Chobham, leave it in the dark, and return before it was light."

His car took Michael back to Chichester at racing pace. Short of the city he turned off the main road, his objective being Griff Towers. It was late when he arrived, and the house presented its usual lifeless appearance. He rang the bell, but there was no immediate reply. He rang again, and then the voice of Sir Gregory hailed him from one of the upper windows.

"Who's there?"

He went out of the porch and looked up. Sir

Gregory Penne did not recognize him in the darkness and called again:

"Who's there?" He followed this with a phrase which Michael guessed was Malay.

"It is I, Michael Brixan. I want to see you, Penne."

"What do you want?"

"Come down, and I will tell you."

"I've gone to bed for the night. See me in the morning."

"I'll see you now," said Michael firmly. "I have a warrant to search this house."

He had no such warrant, but only because he had not asked for one.

The man's head was hastily withdrawn, the window slammed down, and such a long interval passed that Michael thought that the baronet intended denying him admission. This view, however, was wrong. At the end of a dreary period of waiting, the door was opened, and in the light of the hall lamp Sir Gregory Penne presented an extraordinary appearance to his visitor.

He was fully dressed; around his waist were belted two heavy revolvers, but this fact Michael did not immediately notice. The man's head was swathed in bandages; only one eye

was visible; his left arm was stiff with a surgical dressing, and he limped as he walked.

"I've had an accident," he said gruffly.

"It looks like a pretty bad one," said Michael, observing him narrowly.

"I don't want to talk here; come into my room," growled the man.

In Sir Gregory's library there were signs of a struggle. A long mirror which hung on one of the walls was shattered to pieces; and, looking up, Michael saw that one of the two swords was missing.

"You've lost something," he said. "Did that occur in course of the accident?"

Sir Gregory nodded.

Something in the hang of the second sword attracted Michael's attention, and, without asking permission, he lifted it down from its hook and drew the blade from the scabbard. It was brown with blood.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked sternly.

Sir Gregory swallowed something. "A fellow broke into the house last night," he said slowly, "a Malayan fellow. He had some cock-and-bull story about my having carried off his wife. He attacked me, and naturally I defended myself."

"And had you carried off his wife?" asked Michael.

The baronet shrugged. "The idea is absurd. Most of these Borneo folks are mad, and they'll run amuck on the slightest provocation. I did my best to pacify him."

Michael looked again at the stained sword as he spoke.

"So I see," he said dryly. "And did you—pacify him?"

"I defended myself, if that's what you mean. I returned him almost as good as he gave. You don't expect me to sit down and be murdered in my own house, do you? I can use a sword as well as any man."

"And apparently you used it," said Michael. "What happened to Foss?"

Not a muscle of Penne's face moved.

"Whom do you mean?"

"I mean Lawley Foss."

"You mean the scenario writer? I haven't seen him for weeks."

"You're a liar," said Michael calmly. "He was in here last night. I can assure you on this point, because I was in the next room."

"Oh, it was you, was it?" said the baronet, and he seemed relieved. "Yes, he came to bor-

row money. I let him have fifty pounds, and he went away, and that's the last I saw of him."

Michael looked at the sword again. "Would you be surprised to learn that Foss' head **has** been picked up on Chobham Common?" he asked.

The other turned a pair of cold, searching eyes upon his interrogator.

"I shouldn't be very much surprised," he said coolly. "If necessary, I have a witness to prove that Foss went, though I don't like bringing in a lady's name. Miss Stella Mendoza was here, having a bit of supper, as you probably know, if it was you in the next room. He left before she did."

"And he returned," said Michael.

"I never saw him again, I tell you," said the baronet violently. "If you can find anybody who saw him come into this house after his first visit, you can arrest me. Do you think *I* killed him?"

Michael did not answer. "There was a woman upstairs in the tower. What has become of her?"

The other wetted his lips before he replied. "The only woman in the tower was a sick servant; she has gone."



"I'd like to see for myself," said Michael.

Only for a second did the man cast his eyes in the direction of Bhag's den, and then:

"All right," said he. "Follow me."

He went out into the corridor and turned, not toward the hall, but in the opposite direction. Ten paces farther down he stopped and opened a door, so cunningly set in the paneling and so placed between two shaded lights that illuminated the corridor that it was difficult to detect its presence. He put in his hand, turned on a light, and Michael saw a long flight of stairs leading back toward the hall.

As he followed the baronet, he realized that the tower was something of an illusion. It was only a tower if viewed from the front of the house. Otherwise it was a narrow addition, two stories high, built on one side of the building.

They passed through a door, up a circular staircase, and came to the corridor where Michael had seen Bhag squatting on the previous night.

"This is the room," said Penne, opening a door.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE MARKS OF THE BEAST

"ON the contrary, it is not the room," said Michael quietly. "The room is at the end of the passage."

The man hesitated. "Can't you believe me?" he asked in an almost affable tone of voice. "What a skeptical chap you are! Now come, Brixan! I don't want to be bad friends with you. Let's go down and have a drink and forget our past animosities. I'm feeling rotten."

"I want to see that room," said Michael.

"I haven't the key."

"Then get it," said Michael sharply.

Eventually the baronet found a passkey in his pocket, and with every sign of reluctance he opened the door.

"She went away in a bit of a hurry," he said. "She was taken so ill that I had to get rid of her."

"If she left here because she was ill, she went into an institution of some kind, the name of

which you will be able to give me," said Michael as he turned on the light.

One glance at the room told him that the story of her hasty departure may have been accurate. But that the circumstances were normal, the appearance of the room denied. The bed was in confusion; there was blood on the pillow, and a dark-brown stain on the wall. A chair was broken; the carpet had odd and curious stains, one like the print of a bare foot. On a sheet was an indubitable print of a hand, but such a hand as no human being had ever possessed.

"The mark of the beast," said Michael, pointing. "That's Bhag!"

Again the baronet licked his lips. "There was a bit of a fight here," he said. "The man came up and pretended to identify the servant as his wife."

"What happened to him?"

There was no reply.

"What happened to him?" asked Michael with ominous patience.

"I let him go, and I let him take the woman with him. It was easier."

With a sudden exclamation, Michael stooped and picked up from behind the bed a bright steel

object. It was the half of a sword, snapped clean in the middle, and unstained. He looked along the blade and presently found the slightest indent. Picking up the chair he examined the leg and found two deeper dents in one of the legs.

"I'll reconstruct the scene. You and your Bhag caught the man after he had gotten into this room. The chair was broken in the struggle, probably by Bhag, who used the chair. The man escaped from the room, ran downstairs into the library and got the sword from the wall, then came up after you. That's when the real fighting started. I guess some of this blood is yours, Penne."

"Some of it!" snarled the other. "All of it, curse him!"

There was a long silence.

"Did the woman leave this room alive?"

"I believe so," said the other sullenly.

"Did her husband leave your library alive?"

"You'd better find that out. So far as I know—I was unconscious for half an hour. Bhag can use a sword."

Michael did not leave the house till he had searched it from attic to basement. He had every servant assembled and began his interro-

gation. Each of them except one spoke Dutch, but none spoke the language to such purpose that they made him any wiser than he had been. Going back to the library, he put on all the lights.

"I'll see Bhag," he said.

"He's out, I tell you. If you don't believe me——" Penne went to the desk and turned the switch. The door opened, and nothing came out.

A moment's hesitation, and Michael had penetrated into the den, a revolver in one hand, his lamp in the other. The two rooms were scrupulously clean, though a strange animal smell pervaded everything. There was a small bed, with sheets and bankets and feather pillow, where the beast slept; a small larder, full of nuts; a running water tap—he found afterward that, in spite of his cleverness, Bhag was incapable of turning on or off a faucet—a deep, well-worn settee, where the dumb servitor took his rest; and three cricket balls, which were apparently the playthings of this hideous animal.

Bhag's method of entering and leaving the house was now apparent. His exit was a square opening in the wall, with neither window nor curtain, which was situated about seven feet

from the ground; and two projecting steel rungs, set at intervals between the window and the floor, made a sort of ladder. Michael found corresponding rungs on the garden side of the wall.

There was no sign of blood, no evidence that Bhag had taken any part in the terrible scene which must have been enacted the night before.

Going back to the library, he made a diligent search, but found nothing until he went into the little drawing room, where he had hidden the night before. Here on the window sill he found traces enough—the mark of a bare foot, and another which suggested that a heavy body had been dragged through the window.

By this time his chauffeur, who, after dropping him at Griff Towers, went on to Chichester, had returned with the two police officers, and they assisted him in a further search of the grounds. The trail of the fugitive was easy to follow; there were blood stains across the gravel, broken plants in a circular flower bed, the soft loam of which had received the impression of small bare feet. In the vegetable field the trail was lost.

“The question is, who carried whom?” said Inspector Lyle, after Michael in a few words

had told him all that he had learned at the Towers. "It looks to me as if these people were killed in the house and their bodies carried away by Bhag. There's no trace of blood in his room, which means no more than that in all probability he hasn't been there since the killing," said Inspector Lyle. "If we find the monkey we'll solve this little mystery. Penne is The Head-hunter, of course," the inspector went on. "I had a talk with him the other day, and there's something fanatical about the man."

"I am not so sure," said Michael slowly, "that you're right. Perhaps my ideas are just a little bizarre; but if Sir Gregory Penne is the actual murderer, I shall be a very surprised man. I admit," he confessed, "that the absence of any footprints in Bhag's quarters staggered me, and probably your theory is correct. There is nothing to be done but to keep the house under observation until I communicate with head-quarters."

At this moment the second detective, who had been searching the field to its farthestmost boundary, came back to say that he had picked up the trail again near the postern gate, which was open. They hurried across the field and found proof of his discovery. There was a trail both

inside and outside the gate. Near the postern was a big heap of leaves, which had been left by the gardener to rot, and on this they found the impression of a body, as though whoever was the carrier had put his burden down for a little while to rest. In the field beyond the gate, however, the trail was definitely lost.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE MAN IN THE CAR

LIFE is largely made up of little things, but perspective in human affairs is not a gift common to youth. It had required a great effort on the part of Adele Leamington to ask a man to tea, but, once that effort was made, she had looked forward with a curious pleasure to the function.

At the moment Michael was speeding to London, she interviewed Jack Knebworth in his sanctum.

"Certainly, my dear; you may take the afternoon off. I am not quite sure what the schedule was."

He reached out his hand for the written timetable, but she supplied the information.

"You wanted some studio portraits of me—'stills,' " she said.

"So I did! Well, that can wait. Are you feeling pretty confident about the picture?"

"I? No, I'm not confident, Mr. Knebworth; I'm in a state of nerves about it. You see, it

doesn't seem possible that I should make good at the first attempt. One dreams about such things, but in dreams it is easy to jump obstacles and get round dangerous corners and slur over difficulties. Every time you call 'camera!' I am in a state of panic, and I am so self-conscious that I am watching every movement I take, saying to myself: 'You're raising your hands awkwardly; you're turning your head with a jerk.' "

"But that doesn't last?" he said sharply, so sharply she smiled.

"No; the moment I hear the camera turning, I feel that I *am* the character I'm supposed to be."

He patted her on the shoulder. "That is how you *should* feel," he said and went on: "Seen nothing of Mendoza, have you? She isn't annoying you? Or Foss?"

"I've not seen Miss Mendoza for days, but I saw Mr. Foss last night."

She did not explain the curious circumstances, and Jack Knebworth was so incurious that he did not ask. So that he learned nothing of Lawley Foss' mysterious interview with the man in the closed car at the corner of Arundel Road, an incident she had witnessed on the previous night. Nor of the white and womanly hand

that had waved him farewell, nor of the great diamond which had sparkled lustrously on the little finger of the unknown motorist.

Going home, Adele stopped at a confectioner's and a florist's to collect the cakes and flowers that were to adorn the table of Mrs. Watson's parlor. She wondered more than a little just what attraction she offered to this man of affairs. She had a trick of getting outside and examining herself with an impartial eye, and she knew that, by self-repression and almost self-obliteration, she had succeeded in making of Adele Leamington a very colorless, characterless young lady. That she was pretty, she knew; but prettiness in itself attracts only the superficial. Men who are worth knowing require something more than beauty. And Michael was not philandering; he was not that kind. He wanted her for a friend at least; she had no thought that he desired amusement during his enforced stay in a very dull town.

Half past four came and found the girl waiting. At a quarter to five she was at the door, scanning the street. At five, angry, but philosophical, she had her tea and ordered the little maid of all work to clear the table.

Michael had forgotten! Of course she made

excuses for him, only to demolish them and build again. She was hurt, amused, and hurt again. Going upstairs to her room, she lit the gas, took the script from her bag, and tried to study the scenes that were to be shot on the following day, but all manner of distractions interposed between her receptive mind and the typewritten paper. Michael bulked large—and the closed car and Lawley Foss and that waving white hand, as the car drove off. Curiously enough, her speculations came back again and again to the car. It was new, and its woodwork was highly polished, and it moved so noiselessly.

At last she threw the manuscript down and rose, with a doubtful eye on the bed. She was not tired; the hour was nine. Chichester offered few attractions by night. There were two cinemas, and she was not in the mood for cinemas. She put on her hat and went down, calling on her way at the kitchen door.

"I am going out for a quarter of an hour," she told her landlady, who was in an approving mood.

The house was situated in a street of small villas. It was economically illuminated, and there were dark patches, where the light of the street lamps scarcely reached. In one of these

a motor car was standing; she saw the bulk of it before she identified its character. She wondered if the owner knew that its tail light was extinguished. As she came up to the machine, she identified the car she had seen on the previous night. Foss had spoken to its occupant. Glancing to the left, she could see nothing of its interior. The blinds on the road side were drawn, and she thought it was empty; and then a voice said:

"Pretty lady, come with me!"

The voice was a whisper; she caught the flash and sparkle of a precious stone, saw the white hand on the edge of the half-closed window, and in a fit of absurd and unreasoning terror she hurried on.

She heard the whir of an electric starter and the purring of engines. The machine was following her, and she broke into a run. At the corner of the street she saw a man and flew toward him, as she made out the helmet of a policeman.

"What's wrong, Miss?"

As he spoke, the car flashed past, spun round the corner, and was out of sight instantly.

"A man spoke to me—in that car," she said breathlessly.

The stolid constable gazed vacantly at the place where the car had been.

"He didn't have lights," he said stupidly. "I ought to have taken his number. Did he insult you, Miss?"

She shook her head, for she was already ashamed of her fears.

"My nerves are on edge, officer," she said with a smile. "I don't think I will go any farther."

She turned back and hurried to her lodgings. There were disadvantages in starring—even on Jack Knebworth's modest lot. It was nervous work, she thought. She went to sleep that night and dreamed that the man in the car had been Brixan, and he wanted her to come in to tea.

It was past midnight when Michael rang up Jack Knebworth and told him the news.

"Foss!" he gasped. "Good Lord! You don't mean that, Brixan? Shall I come round and see you?"

"I'll come to you," said Michael. "There are one or two things I want to know about the man, and it will create less of a fuss than if I have to admit you to the hotel."

Jack Knebworth rented a house on the Arundel Road, and he was waiting at the garden door

to admit his visitor when Michael arrived. Michael told the story of the discovery of the head, and he felt that he might so far take the director into his confidence as to retail his visit to Sir Gregory Penne.

"That beats everything," said Jack in a hushed tone. "Poor old Foss! You think that Penne did this? But why? You don't cut up a man because he wants to borrow money."

"My views have been switching round a little," said Michael. "You remember a sheet of manuscript that was found among some of your script, and which I told you must have been written by The Head-hunter?"

Jack nodded.

"I'm perfectly sure," Michael went on, "and particularly after seeing the erasure in the scenario book, that Foss knew who was the author of that manuscript, and I'm equally certain that he resolved upon the desperate expedient of blackmailing the writer. If that is the case, and if Sir Gregory is the man—again I am very uncertain on this point—there is a good reason why he should be put out of the way. There is one person who can help us, and that is——"

"Mendoza," said Jack, and the two men's eyes met.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE HAND

**THE** director looked at his watch. "I guess she'll be in bed by now, but it's worth while trying. Would you like to see her?"

Michael hesitated. Stella Mendoza was a friend of Penne's, and he was loath to commit himself irretrievably to the view that Penne was the murderer.

"Yes, I think we'll see her," he said. "After all, Penne knows that he is suspected."

Jack Knebworth was ten minutes on the telephone before he succeeded in getting a reply from Stella's cottage. He finally made the connection.

"It's Knebworth speaking, Miss Mendoza," he said. "Is it possible to see you tonight? Mr. Brixan wants to speak to you."

"At this hour of the night?" she asked in sleepy surprise. "I was in bed when the bell rang. Won't it do in the morning?"



"No, he wants to see you particularly tonight. I'll come along with him if you don't mind."

"What is wrong?" she asked quickly. "Is it about Gregory?"

Jack whispered a query to the man who stood at his side, and Michael nodded.

"Yes, it is about Gregory," said Knebworth.

"Will you come along? I'll have time to dress."

Stella was dressed by the time they arrived, and she was too curious and too alarmed to make the hour of the call a matter of comment. "What is the trouble?" she asked.

"Mr. Foss is dead."

"Dead?" She opened her eyes wide. "Why, I only saw him yesterday. But how?"

"He has been murdered," said Michael quietly. "His head has been found on Chobham Common."

She would have fallen to the floor, had not Michael's arm been there to support her, and it was some time before she recovered sufficiently to answer coherently the questions which were put to her.

"No, I didn't see Mr. Foss again after he left the Towers, and then I only saw him for a few seconds."

"Did he suggest he was coming back again?"

She shook her head.

"Did Sir Gregory tell you he was returning?"

"No." She shook her head again. "He told me that he was glad to see the last of him, and that he had borrowed fifty pounds until next week, when he expected to make a lot of money. Gregory is like that—he will tell you things about people, things which they ask him not to make public. He is rather proud of his wealth and what he calls his charity."

"You had a luncheon engagement with him," said Michael, watching her.

She bit her lip. "You must have heard me talking when I left him," she said. "No, I had no luncheon engagement. That was camouflage, intended for anybody who was hanging around, and we knew somebody had been in the house that night. Was it you?"

Michael nodded.

"Oh, I'm so relieved!" She heaved a deep sigh. "Those few minutes in that dark room were terrible to me. I thought it was——" She hesitated.

"Bhag?" suggested Michael.

"Yes. You don't suspect Gregory of killing Foss?"

"I suspect everybody in general and nobody in particular," said Michael. "Did you see Bhag?"

She shivered. "No, not that time. I've seen him, of course. He gives me the creeps! I've never seen anything so human. Sometimes, when Gregory was a little—a little drunk, he used to bring Bhag out and make him do tricks. Do you know that Bhag could do all the Malayan exercises with the sword! Sir Gregory had a specially made wooden sword for him, and the way that awful thing used to twirl it round his head was terrifying."

Michael stared at her. "Bhag *could* use the sword? Penne told me he did, but I thought he was lying."

"Oh, yes, he could use the sword. Gregory taught him everything."

"What is Penne to you?" Michael asked the question bluntly, and she colored.

"He has been a friend," she said awkwardly, "a very good friend of mine—financially, I mean. He took a liking to me a long time ago, and we've been very good friends."

Michael nodded. "And you are still?"

"No," she answered shortly, "I've finished with Gregory, and I am leaving Chichester

tomorrow. I've put the house in an agent's hands to rent. Poor Mr. Foss!" she said, and there were tears in her eyes. "Poor soul! Gregory wouldn't have done it, Mr. Brixan, I'll swear to that! There's a whole lot of Gregory that's sheer bluff. He's a coward at heart, and, though he has done dreadful things, he has always had an agent to do all the dirty work for him."

"Dreadful things like what?"

She seemed reluctant to explain, but he pressed her.

"Well, he told me that he used to take expeditions in the bush and raid the villages, carrying off girls. There is one tribe that have very beautiful women. Perhaps he was lying about that, too, but I have an idea that he spoke the truth. He told me that, only a year ago, when he was in Borneo, he 'lifted' a girl from a wild village, where it was death for a European to go. He always said lifted."

"And didn't you mind these confessions?" asked Michael.

She shrugged her shoulders. "He was that kind of man," was all she said, and it spoke volumes for her understanding of her "very good friend."

Michael walked back to Jack Knebworth's house.

"The story Penne tells seems to fit together with the information Mendoza has given us. There is no doubt that the woman at the top of the tower was the lady he lifted, and less doubt that the little brown man was her husband. If they have escaped from the Towers, then there should be no difficulty in finding them. I'll send out a message to all stations within a radius of twenty-five miles, and we ought to get news of them in the morning."

"It's morning now," said Jack, looking toward the graying east. "Will you come in? I'll give you some coffee. This news has upset me. I was going to have a long day's work, but I guess we'll have to put it off for a day or so. The company is bound to be upset by this news. They all knew Foss, although he was not very popular with them. It only wants Adele to be off color to complete our misery. By the way, Brixan, why don't you make this your headquarters? I'm a bachelor; there's a phone service here, and you'll get a privacy at this house which you don't get at your hotel."

The idea appealed to the detective, and it was at Jack Knebworth's house that he slept that

night, after an hour's conversation on the telephone with Scotland Yard.

Early in the morning he was again at the Towers, and now, with the assistance of daylight, he enlarged his search, without adding greatly to his knowledge. The position was a peculiar one, as Scotland Yard had emphasized. Sir Gregory Penne was a member of a good family, a rich man, a justice of the peace; and, while his eccentricities were of a lawless character, "you can't hang people for being queer," the Commissioner informed Michael on the telephone.

It was a suspicious fact that Bhag had disappeared as completely as the brown man and his wife.

"He hasn't been back all night; I've seen nothing of him," said Sir Gregory. "And that's not the first time he's gone off on his own. He finds hiding places that you'd never suspect, and he's probably gone to earth somewhere."

Michael was passing through Chichester when he saw a figure that made him bring the car to a standstill with such a jerk that it was a wonder the tires did not burst. In a second he was out of the machine and walking to meet Adele.

"It seems ten thousand years since I saw

you," he said with an extravagance which at any other time would have brought a smile to her face.

"I'm afraid I can't stop. I'm on my way to the studio," she said a little coldly; "and I promised Mr. Knebworth that I would be there early. You see, I got off yesterday afternoon by telling Mr. Knebworth that I had an engagement."

"And had you?" asked the innocent Michael.

"I asked somebody to take tea with me."

Michael's jaw dropped. "Moses!" he gasped. "I am the villain!"

She would have gone on, but he stopped her.

"I don't want to shock you or hurt you, Adele," he said gently, "but the explanation for my forgetfulness is that we've had another tragedy."

She stopped and looked at him. "Another——"

He nodded. "Mr. Foss has been murdered," he said.

She went very white. "When?"

"The night before last."

"It was after nine," she said.

His eyebrows went up in surprise. "Why do you say that?"

"Because, Mr. Brixan"—she spoke slowly—

"at nine o'clock I saw the hand of the man who murdered him! Two nights ago I went out to buy some wool I wanted. It was just before the shops closed—a quarter to eight, I think. In the town I saw Mr. Foss and spoke to him. He was very nervous and restless, and again he made a suggestion to me which he had already made when he called on me. His manner was so strange that I asked him if he was in any trouble. He told me no, but he had had an awful premonition that something dreadful was going to happen, and he asked me if I'd lived in Chichester for any length of time, and if I knew about the caves."

"The caves?" said Michael quickly.

She nodded. "I was surprised. I'd never heard of the caves. He told me there was a reference to them in some old history of Chichester. He had looked in the guidebooks without finding anything about them. Apparently there were caves at some time or other near Chellerton, but there was a heavy subsidence of earth that closed the entrance. He was so rambling and so disjointed that I thought he must have been drinking, and I was glad to get away from him. I went on to do my shopping and met one of the extra girls I knew. She asked me to go home



with her. I didn't want to go a bit, but I thought if I refused she would think I was giving myself airs, and so I went. As soon as I could I came away and went straight home.

"It was then nine o'clock, and the streets were empty. They are not very well lit in Chichester, but I was able to recognize Mr. Foss. He was standing at the corner of Arundel Road, and he was evidently waiting for somebody. I stopped, because I particularly did not wish to meet Mr. Foss; I was on the point of turning round when a car drove into the road and stopped almost opposite him."

"What sort of a car?" asked Michael.

"It was a closed landaulette. I think they call them sedans. As it came round the corner, its lights went out, which struck me as being curious. Mr. Foss was evidently waiting for this, for he went up and leaned on the edge of the window and spoke to somebody inside. I don't know what made me do it, but I had an extraordinary impulse to see who was in the car, and I started walking toward them. I must have been five or six yards away when Mr. Foss stepped back, and the sedan moved on. The driver put his hand out of the window, as if he were waving good-by. It was still out of the

window, and the only thing visible—the interior was quite dark—when it came abreast of me.”

“Was there anything peculiar about the hand?”

“Nothing except that it was small and white and on the little finger was a large diamond ring. The fire in it was extraordinary, and I wondered why a man should wear a ring of that kind. You will think I am silly, but the sight of that hand gave me a terrible feeling of fear. I don’t know why, even now. There was something unnatural and abnormal about it. When I looked round again, Mr. Foss was walking rapidly in the other direction, and I made no attempt to overtake him.”

“You saw no number on the car?”

“None whatever.” She shook her head. “I wasn’t so curious.”

“You didn’t even see the silhouette of the man inside?”

“No, I saw nothing. His arm was raised.”

“What size was the diamond, do you think?”

She pursed her lips dubiously. “He passed me in a flash, and I can’t give you any very accurate information, Mr. Brixan. It may be a mistake on my part, but I thought it was as big as the tip of my finger. Naturally I couldn’t

see any details, even though I saw the car again last night."

She went on to tell him of what happened on the previous night, and he listened intently.

"The man spoke to you! Did you recognize his voice?"

She shook her head. "No, he spoke in a whisper. I did not see his face, though I have an idea he was wearing a cap. The policeman said he should have taken the number of the car."

"Oh, the policeman said that, did he?" remarked Michael sardonically. "Well, there's hope for him." For a moment he was immersed in thought, and then: "I'll take you to the studio if you don't mind," said Michael.

He left her to go to her dressing room, there to learn that work had been suspended for the day; while he went in search of Jack.

"You've seen everybody of consequence in this neighborhood," he said. "Do you know anybody who drives a sedan and wears a large diamond ring on the little finger of the right hand?"

"The only person I know who has that weakness is Mendoza," he said.

Michael whistled. "I never thought of Men-

doza," he said, "and Adele described the hand as 'small and womanly.' "

"Mendoza's hand isn't particularly small, but it would look small on a man," said Jack thoughtfully. "And her car isn't a closed sedan, but that doesn't mean anything. By the way, I've just sent instructions to tell the company I'm working today. If we let these people stand around thinking, they'll get thoroughly upset."

"I thought that, too," said Michael with a smile, "but I didn't dare make the suggestion."

An urgent message took him to London that afternoon where he attended a conference at Scotland Yard. At the end of the two-hour discussion, the conclusion was reached that Sir Gregory Penne was to remain at large, but under observation.

"We verified the story about the lifting of this girl in Borneo," said the quiet-spoken chief, "and all the facts dovetail. I haven't the slightest doubt in my mind that Penne is the culprit, but we've got to walk very warily. I dare say in your department, Captain Brixan, you can afford to take a few risks; but the police in this country never make an arrest for murder unless they are absolutely certain that a conviction will

follow. There may be something in your other theory, and I'd be the last man in the world to turn it down, but you'll have to conduct parallel investigations."

Michael ran down to Sussex in broad daylight. There was a long stretch of road about four miles north of Chichester, and he was pelting along this when he became aware of a figure standing in the middle of the roadway, with its arms outstretched. Michael slowed down. It was Mr. Sampson Longvale, he saw to his amazement. Almost before the car had stopped, with an extraordinary display of agility, Mr. Longvale jumped on the running board.

"I have been watching for you this last two hours, Mr. Brixan," he said. "Do you mind if I join you?"

"Come right in," said Michael heartily.

"You are going to Chichester, I know. Would you mind, instead, coming to Dower House? I have something important to tell you."

The place at which he had signaled the car to stop was exactly opposite the end of the road that led to Dower House and Sir Gregory's domain. The old man told him that he had walked back from Chichester, and he had been waiting for the passing of the car.

"I learned for the first time, Mr. Brixan, that you are an officer of the law," he said with a stately inclination of his head. "I need hardly tell you how greatly I respect one whose duty it is to serve the cause of justice."

"Mr. Knebworth told you, I presume?" said Michael with a smile.

"He told me," agreed the other gravely. "I went in really to seek you, having an intuition that you had some more important position in life than what I had first imagined. I confess I thought at first that you were one of those idle young men who have nothing to do but to amuse themselves. It was a great gratification to me to learn that I was mistaken. It is all the more gratifying"—Michael smiled inwardly at the verbosity of age—"because I need advice on a point of law which I imagine my lawyer would not offer me. My position is a very peculiar one, in some ways embarrassing. I am a man who shrinks from the eye of the public, and I am averse from vulgar meddling in other people's affairs."

What had he to tell, Michael wondered. This old man, with his habit of nocturnal strolls, might have been a witness to something that had not yet come out.

They stopped at Dower House, and the old man got out and opened the gate, not closing it until Michael had passed through. Instead of going direct to his sitting room, he went upstairs, beckoning Michael to come after, and stopped before the room which had been occupied by Adele on the night of her terrible experience.

"I wish you to see these people," said Mr. Longvale earnestly, "and tell me whether I am acting in accordance with the law."

He opened the door, and Mike saw that there were now two beds in the room. On one, heavily bandaged and apparently unconscious, was the brown-faced man; on the other, sleeping, was the woman Michael had seen in the Towers. She, too, was badly wounded; her arm was bandaged and strapped into position.

Michael drew a long breath. "That is a mystery solved, anyway," he said. "Where did you find these people?"

At the sound of his voice the woman opened her eyes and frowned at him fearfully, then looked across to the man.

"You have been wounded?" said Michael in Dutch, but apparently her education had been neglected in respect of European languages, for she made no reply. She was so uncomfortable

at the sight of him that Michael was glad to go out of the room. It was not until they were back in his sanctum that Mr. Longvale told his story.

"I saw them last night about half past eleven," he said. "They were staggering down the road, and I thought at first they were intoxicated, but fortunately the woman spoke, and, as I have never forgotten a voice, even when it spoke in a language that was unfamiliar to me, I realized immediately that it was my patient, and I went out to intercept her. I then saw the condition of her companion, and she, recognizing me, began to speak excitedly in a language which I could not understand, though I would have been singularly dense if I had had any doubt as to her meaning. The man was on the point of collapse, but, assisted by the woman, I managed to get him into the house and to the room where he now is. Fortunately, in the expectation of again being called to attend her, I had purchased a small stock of surgical dressing and was able to attend to the man."

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Michael.

"He has lost a considerable quantity of blood," said the other; "and, though there seem to be no arteries severed or bones broken, the



wounds have an alarming appearance. Now, it has occurred to me," he went on in his oddly profound manner, "that this unfortunate native could not have received his injury except as the result of some illegal act, and I thought the best thing to do was to notify the police that they were under my care. I called first upon my excellent friend, Mr. John Knebworth, and I opened my heart to him. He then told me of your position, and I decided to wait your return before I took any further steps."

"Is the man fit to be moved?"

"I think so," nodded the old gentleman. "He is sleeping heavily now, and he has the appearance of being in a state of coma, but that is not the case."

"Did he have a sword?"

Mr. Longvale clicked his lips impatiently. "How stupid of me to forget that! Yes, it is in here."

He went to a drawer in an old-fashioned bureau, pulled it open, and took out the identical sword which Michael had seen hanging above the mantelpiece at Griff Towers. It was spotlessly clean and had been so when Mr. Longvale took it from the brown man's hands. And yet he did not expect it to be in any other con-

dition; for to the swordsman of the East his sword is his child, and probably the brown man's first care had been to wipe it clean.

Michael was taking his leave when he suddenly asked:

"I wonder if it would give you too much trouble, Mr. Longvale, to get me a glass of water? My throat is parched."

With an exclamation of apology the old man hurried away, leaving Michael in the hall.

Hanging on pegs was the long overcoat of the master of Dower House, and beside it were the curly-brimmed beaver and a very prosaic derby hat, which Michael took down the moment the old man's back was turned. It had been no ruse of his, this demand for a drink, for he was parched. Only Michael had the inquisitiveness of his profession.

The old gentleman returned quickly, to find Michael examining the hat.

"Where did this come from?" asked the detective.

"That was the hat the native was wearing when he arrived," said Mr. Longvale.

"I will take it with me, if you don't mind," said Michael, after a long silence.

"With all the pleasure in life. Our friend

upstairs will not need a hat for a very long time," he said with a whimsical little smile.

Michael went back to his car, put the hat carefully beside him, and drove into Chichester; and all the way he was in a state of wonder. For inside the hat were the initials "L. F." How came the hat of Lawley Foss on the head of the brown man from Borneo?

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE CAVES

THAT night Mr. Longvale's two patients were removed to the hospital, with a favorable report on the man's condition from the doctors; Michael felt that one aspect of the mystery was a mystery no longer.

His old schoolmaster received a visit that night.

"More study?" he asked good-humoredly when Michael was announced.

"Curiously enough, you're right, sir," said Michael, "though I doubt very much whether you can assist me. Want an old history of Chichester."

"I have one published in 1600. You're the second man in the last fortnight who wanted to see it."

"Who was the other?" asked Michael quickly.

"A man named Foss," said Mr. Scott, and Michael nodded, as though he had known the identity of the seeker after knowledge. "He wanted to know about caves. I've never heard

there were any local caves of any celebrity. Now, if this were Cheddar, I should be able to give you quite a lot of information. I am an authority on the Cheddar Caves."

He showed Michael into the library, and taking down an ancient volume, laid it on the library table.

"After Foss had gone I looked up the reference. I find it occurs only on one page—385. It deals with the disappearance of a troop of horsemen under Sir John Dudley, Earl of Newport, in some local trouble in the days of Stephen. Here is the passage." He pointed to the old-fashioned type:

The noble Earl, deciding to await his arrival, carried two *companies* of horse by night into the great caves which existed in these times. By the merciful dispensation of God, in Whose Hands we are, there occurred, at eight o'clock in the forenoon, a great landslide which entombed and destroyed all these knights and squires and Sir John Dudley, Earl of Newport, so that they were never more seen. And the place of this happening is nine miles in a line from this same city, called by the Romans, Regnum, or Ciffanceafter in the Saxon fashion.

"Have the caves ever been located?"

Mr. Scott shook his head. "There are local rumors that they were used a century and a half ago by brandy smugglers, but then you find those traditions local to every district."

Michael took a local map of Chichester from his pocket, measured off nine miles, and with a pair of compasses encircled the city. He noted that the line passed either through or near Sir Gregory's estate.

"There are two Griff Towers?" he suddenly said, examining the map.

"Yes, there is another besides Penne's place, which is named after a famous local landmark—the real Griffin Tower, as it was originally called. I have an idea it stands either within or about Penne's property—a very old, circular tower, about twenty feet high and anything up to two thousand years old. I'm interested in antiquities, and I have made a very careful inspection of the place. The lower part of the wall is undoubtedly Roman work. The Romans had a big encampment here; in fact Regnum was one of their headquarters. There were all sorts of explanations for the tower. Probably it was a keep or blockhouse. The idea I have is that the original Roman tower was not more than a few feet high and was not designed for defense at all. Successive ages added to its height, without exactly knowing why."

Michael chuckled.

"Now, if my theory is correct, I shall hear

more about this Roman castle before the night is out," he said.

He gathered his trunks from the hotel and took them off to his new home. He found that the dinner table was laid for three.

"Expecting company?" asked Michael, watching Jack Knebworth putting the finishing touches on the table. He had a bachelor's finicking sense of neatness, which consists in placing everything at equal distance from everything else.

"Yes, a friend of yours."

"Of mine?"

Jack nodded.

"I've asked young Miss Leamington to come up. When I see a man of your age turning pink at the mention of a girl's name, I feel sorry for him. She's coming partly on business, partly for the pleasure of meeting me in a human atmosphere. She didn't do so well today as I wanted, but I guess we were all a little short of our best."

Adele came soon after, and there was something about her that was very sweet and appealing — something that went straight to Michael's heart and consolidated the position she had taken there.

"I was thinking, as I came along," she said, as Jack Knebworth helped her off with her coat, "how very unreal everything is. I never dreamed I should be your guest to dinner, Mr. Knebworth."

"And I never dreamed you'd be worthy of such a distinction," growled Jack. "And in five years' time you'll be saying, 'Why on earth did I make such a fuss about being asked to a skimpy meal by that punk director, Knebworth?'"

He put his hand on her shoulder and led her into the room, and then for the first time she saw Michael, and that young man had a momentary sense of dismay when he saw her face drop. It was only for a second, and, as if reading his thoughts, she explained her sudden change of mien.

"I thought we were going to talk nothing but pictures and pictures!" she said.

"So you shall," said Michael. "I'm the best listener on earth, and the first person to mention murder will be thrown out of the window."

"Then I'll prepare for the flight!" she said good-humoredly. "For I'm going to talk murder and mystery—later!"

Under the expanding influence of a sympa-



thetic environment the girl took on a new aspect, and all that Michael had suspected in her was amply proven. The shyness, the almost frigid reserve, melted in the company of two men, one of whom, she guessed, was fond of her, while the other—well, Michael was at least a friend.

"I have been doing detective work this afternoon," she said after the coffee had been served, "and I've made amazing discoveries," she added solemnly. "It started by my trying to track the motor car, which I guessed must have come into my street through a lane which runs across the far end. It is the only motor-car track I've found, and I don't think there is any doubt it was my white-handed man who drove it. You see, I noticed the back tire, which had a sort of diamond-shaped design on it, and it was fairly easy to follow the marks. Half-way up the lane I found a place where there was oil in the middle of the road, and where the car must have stood for some time, and there I found this!"

She opened her little hand bag and took out a small, dark-green bottle. It bore no label and was unstoppered. Michael took it from her hand, examined it curiously, and smelt. There was a distinctive, pungent odor.

"Do you recognize it?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Let me try." Jack Knebworth took the bottle from Michael's hand and sniffed. "Butyl chloride," he said quickly, and the girl nodded.

"I thought it was that. Father was a pharmaceutical chemist, and once, when I was playing in his dispensary, I found a cupboard open and took down a pretty bottle and opened it. I don't know what would have happened to me, if daddy had not seen me. I was quite a child at the time, and I've always remembered that scent."

"Butyl chloride?" Michael frowned, ignorant of its properties.

"It's known as the 'death drop' or the 'knock-out drop'," said Knebworth; "and it's a drug very much in favor with sharks who make a business of robbing sailors. A few drops of that in a glass of wine, and you're out!"

Michael took the bottle again. It was a commonplace bottle, such as is used for the dispensation of poisons, and in fact the word "Poison" was blown into the glass.

"There is no trace of a label," he said.

"And really there is no connection with the mysterious car," admitted the girl. "My surmise

is merely guesswork—putting one sinister thing to another.”

“Where was it?”

“In a ditch, which is very deep there and is flooded just now; but the bottle didn’t roll down so far as the water. That is my first discovery. Here is the second.”

From her bag she took a curious shaped piece of steel, both ends of which had the marks of a break.

“Do you know what that is?” she asked.

“It beats me,” said Jack and handed the find to Michael.

“I know what it is, because I’ve seen it at the studio,” said the girl; “and you know too, don’t you, Mr. Brixan?”

Mike nodded. “It’s the central link of a handcuff,” he said; “the link that has the swivel.”

It was covered with spots of rust which had been cleaned off by the girl, as she told him.

“Those are my two finds. I am not going to offer you my conclusions, because I have none.”

“They may not have been thrown from the car at all,” said Michael, “but, as you say, there is a possibility that the owner of the car chose that peculiarly deserted spot to rid himself of

two articles which he could not afford to have on the premises. It would have been safer to throw them into the sea but this, I suppose, was the easier and to him the safer method. I will keep these."

He wrapped them in paper, put them away in his pocket, and the conversation drifted back to picture-taking.

"We're shooting at Griff Towers tomorrow—the real tower," said Jack Knebworth. "It is one of the landmarks. What is there amusing in Griff Towers?" he demanded.

"Nothing particularly amusing, except that you have fulfilled a prediction of mine," said Michael. "I knew I should hear of that darned old tower!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE TOWER

PERHAPS Michael was a little perturbed in mind. He took a more serious view of the closed car than did the girl, and the invitation to the "pretty lady" to step inside was particularly disturbing. Since the events of the past few days it had been necessary to withdraw the detective who was watching the girl's house, and he decided to re-establish the guard, employing a local officer for the purpose, one who would be reliable.

After he had driven Adele home, he went to the police station and made his wishes known; but it was too late to see the chief constable, and the subordinate officer in charge did not wish to take the responsibility of detaching an officer for the purpose. It was only when Michael threatened to call the chief on the telephone that he reluctantly drew on his reserves and put a uniformed officer to patrol the street.

Back again at Knebworth's house, Michael examined the two articles which the girl had found. Butyl chloride was a drug and a par-

ticularly violent one. What use would The Head-hunter have for that, he wondered.

As for the handcuff link, he examined it again. Terrific force must have been employed to snap the connecting links. This was a mystery to him, and he gave it up with a sense of annoyance at his own incompetence. Before going to bed he received a phone message from Inspector Lyle, who was watching Griff Towers. There was nothing new to report, and apparently life was pursuing its normal round. And the inspector had been invited into the house by Sir Gregory, who had told him that Bhag was still missing.

"I'll keep you there tonight," said Michael. "Tomorrow we will lift the watch. Scotland Yard is satisfied that Sir Gregory had nothing to do with Foss' death."

A grunt from the other end of the phone expressed the inspector's disagreement with that view.

"He's in it somehow," he said. "By the way, I've found a blood-stained derby hat in the field outside the grounds. It has the name of 'Chi—Stores, Tjandi,' inside."

This was news indeed. "Let me see it in the morning," said Michael after long cogitation.

Soon after breakfast the next morning the hat came and was inspected. Knebworth, who had heard most of the story from Michael, examined the new clew curiously.

"If the brown man wore Lawley's hat when he arrived at Mr. Longvale's, where in the name of fate did the change take place? It must have been somewhere between the Towers and the old man's house, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Michael. He had a great respect for Knebworth's shrewd judgment.

"Unless the change took place at Sir Gregory's house. You see that, although it is blood-stained, there are no cuts in it, which is funny."

"Very funny," agreed Mike ruefully. "And yet, if my first theory was correct, the explanation is simple." He did not tell his host what his theory was.

Accompanying Knebworth to the studio, he watched the char-à-bancs drive off, wishing that he had made some excuse and the leisure to accompany them on their expedition. It was a happy, cheerful throng, and its very association was a tonic to his spirits.

He put through his usual call to London. There was no news. There was really no reason

why he should not go, he decided recklessly; and, as soon as his decision was taken, his car was pounding on the trail of the jay wagon. He saw the tower a quarter of an hour before he came up to it—a squat, ancient building for all the world like an inordinately high sheepfold. When he came up to them, the char-à-banc had been drawn on to the grass, and the company was putting the finishing touches to its make-up. Adele he did not see at once; she was changing in a little canvas tent, while Jack Knebworth and the camera man wrangled over light and position.

Michael had too much intelligence to butt in at this moment, and he strolled up to the tower, examining the curious courses which generation after generation had added to the original foundation. He knew very little of masonry, but he was able to detect the Roman portion of the wall, and he thought he saw the place where the Saxon builders had filled in a gap.

One of the hands was fixing a ladder up which Roselle was to pass. The story which was being filmed was that of a girl who, starting life in the chorus, had become the wife of a nobleman with archaic ideas. The poor, but honest, young man who had loved her in her youth was ever at



hand to help her; and now, when shut up in a stone room of the keep, he was to rescue her.

The actual castle tower had been shot in Arundel. The old Griff tower was to serve for a close-up, showing the girl descending from her prison in the arms of her lover, by the aid of a rope of knotted sheets.

"It's going to be deuced awkward getting down," said Reggie lugubriously. "Of course they've got a rope inside the sheet, so there's no chance of it breaking. But Miss Leamington is really awfully heavy! You try and lift her yourself, and see how you like it!" Nothing would have given Michael greater pleasure than to carry out the instructions literally.

"It's too robust a part for me—it is really," said Reggie Connolly. "I've told Knebworth that it isn't the job for me."

"It's easy," said Knebworth, who had walked up and overheard the latter part of the conversation. "Miss Leamington will hold the rope and take the weight off you. All you've got to do is to look brave and pretty."

"That's all very well," grumbled Reggie, "but climbing down ropes is not the job I was engaged for."

"Try it," said Jack laconically.

The property man had fixed the rope to an iron staple which he had driven to the inside of the tower, the top of which would not be shown in the picture. The actual descent had been acted by "doubles" in Arundel on a long shot. This was only the close-up that Jack needed. The first rehearsal nearly ended in disaster. With a squeak Connolly let go his burden, and the girl would have fallen but for her firm grip on the rope.

"Try it again," stormed Jack. "Remember you're playing a man's part. A child would hold her better than that!"

They tried again, and this time with greater success.

"Camera!" said Knebworth shortly, and then began the actual taking of the picture.

The camera was moved off twenty or thirty yards, and while Reggie Connolly waited on the ground, the girl walked over to Michael.

"I'm glad that's over," she said thankfully. "Poor Mr. Connolly! The awful language he was using nearly made me laugh, and that would have meant that we should have had to take it all over again. But it wasn't easy," she added.

Her own arm was bruised, and the rope had rubbed raw a little place on her wrist. Michael

had an insane desire to kiss the raw skin, but restrained himself.

"What did you think of me? Did I look anything approaching graceful? I felt like a bundle of straw!"

"You looked wonderful!" he said fervently, and she shot a quick glance at him and dropped her eyes.

"Perhaps you're prejudiced," she said demurely.

"I have that feeling, too," said Michael. "What is inside?" he pointed.

"Inside the tower? Nothing, except a lot of rock and wild bush and a pathetic dwarf tree. I loved it."

He laughed. "Just now you said you were glad it was over. I presume you were referring to the play and not to the interior of the tower?"

She nodded, a twinkle in her eye. "Mr. Knebworth says he may have to take a night shot, if he's not satisfied with the day picture. Poor Mr. Connolly! He'll throw up his part."

At that moment Jack Knebworth's voice was heard. "Don't take the ladder, Collins," he shouted. "Put it down on the grass behind the tower. I may have to come up here tonight, so

you can leave anything that won't be hurt by the weather; you can collect it again in the morning."

Adele made a little face. "I was afraid he would," she said. "Not that I mind very much—it's rather fun. But Mr. Connolly's nervousness communicates itself in some way. I wish you were playing that part."

"I wish to heaven I were!" said Michael, with such sincerity in his voice that she colored.

Jack Knebworth came toward them. "Did you leave anything up there, Adele?" he asked, pointing to the tower.

"No, Mr. Knebworth," she said in surprise.

"Well, what's that?" He pointed to something round that showed above the edge of the tower top. "Why, it's moving!" he gasped.

As he spoke, a head came slowly into view. It was followed by a massive pair of hairy shoulders, and then a leg was thrown over the wall.

It was Bhag! His tawny hair was white with dust, and his face was powdered grotesquely. All these things Michael noticed. Then as the creature put out his arm to steady himself Michael saw that each wrist was encircled by the half of a broken pair of handcuffs!

## CHAPTER XXIX

### BHAG'S RETURN .

THE girl screamed and gripped Michael's arm. "What is that?" she asked. "Is it the thing that came to my—my room?"

Michael put her gently aside and ran toward the tower. As he did so Bhag took a leap and dropped on the ground. For a moment he stood, his knuckles on the ground, his malignant face turned in the direction of the man. And then he sniffed and, with that queer twittering noise of his, went across the downs and disappeared over a near-by crest.

Michael raced in pursuit. By the time he came into view, the great ape was a quarter of a mile away, running at top speed and always keeping close to the hedges that divided the fields he had to cross. Pursuit was useless, and the detective went slowly back to the alarmed company.

"It is only an orang-outang belonging to Sir Gregory; it's perfectly harmless," he said. "He has been missing from the house for two or three days."

"He must have been hiding in the tower," said Knebworth, and Michael nodded. "Well, I'm darned glad he didn't choose to come out at the moment I was shooting," said the director, mopping his forehead. "You didn't see anything of him, Adele?"

Michael guessed that the girl was pale under her yellow make-up, and the hand she raised to her lips shook a little, although she tried to control it.

"That explains the mystery of the handcuffs," said Knebworth.

"Did you notice them?" asked Michael quickly. "Yes, that explains the broken link," he said, "but it doesn't exactly explain the butyl chloride."

He held the girl's arm, as he spoke, and in the warm, strong pressure she felt something more than his sympathy.

"Were you a little frightened?"

"I was badly frightened," she confessed. "How terrible! Was that Bhag?"

He nodded. "That was Bhag," he said. "I suppose he's been hiding in the tower ever since his disappearance. You saw nothing when you were on the top of the wall?"

"I'm glad to say I didn't, or I should have

dropped. There are a large number of bushes where he might have been hidden."

Michael decided to look for himself. They put up the ladder, and he climbed to the broad top of the tower and looked down. At the base of the stonework the ground sloped away in a manner curiously reminiscent of the shell holes he had seen during the war in France. The actual floor of the tower was not visible under the hawthorn bushes which grew thickly at the center. He caught a glimpse of the jagged edges of rock, the distorted branches of an old tree, and that was all.

There was ample opportunity for concealment. Possibly Bhag had hidden there most of the time, sleeping off the effects of his labor and his wounds; for Michael had seen something that nobody else had noticed—the gashed skin and the ear that had been slashed in half.

He came down the ladder again and rejoined Knebworth.

"I think that finishes our work for today," said Jack dubiously. "I smell hysteria, and it will be a long time before I can get the girls to come up for a night picture."

Michael drove the director back in his car, and all the way home he was considering this

strange appearance of the ape. Somebody had handcuffed Bhag; he ought to have guessed that when he saw the torn link. No human being could have broken those apart. And Bhag had escaped—from whom? How? And why had he not returned to Griff Towers and to his master?

When he had dropped the director at the studio he went straight on to Sir Gregory's house and found the baronet playing clock golf on a strip of lawn that ran by the side of the house. The man was still heavily bandaged, but he was making good recovery.

"Yes, Bhag is back. He returned half an hour ago. Where he had been, Heaven knows! I've often wished that chap could talk, but I've never wished it so much as I do at this moment. Somebody had put irons on him; I've just taken them off."

"Can I see them?"

"You knew it, did you?"

"I saw him. He came out of the old tower on the hill." Michael pointed; from where they stood, the tower was in sight.

"Is that so? And what was he doing there?" Sir Gregory scratched his chin thoughtfully. "He's been away before, but mostly he goes to



some land of mine about three miles away, where there's plenty of cover but no intruders. I discovered that when a poacher saw him and, like a fool, shot at him; that poacher was a lucky man to escape with his life. Have you found the body of Foss?"

The baronet had resumed his playing and was looking at the ball at his feet.

"No," said Michael quietly.

"Expect to find it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Sir Gregory stood, his hands leaning on his club, looking across the wold. "What's the law in this country, suppose a man accidentally kills a servant who tried to knife him?"

"He would have to stand his trial," said Michael, "and a verdict of 'justifiable homicide' would be returned, and he would be set free."

"Suppose he didn't reveal it? Suppose he—well, did away with the body—buried it—and let the matter slide? What would happen then?"

"Then he would place himself in a remarkably dangerous position," said Michael. "Particularly"—he watched the man closely—"if a woman friend, who is no longer a woman friend, happened to be a witness, or had knowledge of the act."

Gregory Penne's one visible eye blinked quickly, and he went that curious purple color which Michael had seen before when he was agitated. "Suppose she tried to get money out of him by threatening to tell the police?"

"Then," said the patient Michael, "she would go to prison for blackmail and possibly as an accessory to or after the fact."

"Would she?" Sir Gregory's voice was eager. "She would be an accessory if she saw him cut the man down? Mind you, this happened years ago. There's a statute of limitations, isn't there?"

"Not for murder," said Michael.

"Murder! Would you call that murder?" asked the other in alarm. "In self-defense? Rot!"

Things were gradually being made light to Michael. Once Stella Mendoza had called the man a murderer, and Michael's nimble mind, which could reconstruct the scene with almost unerring precision, began to grow active. A servant, a colored man, probably one of his Malayan slaves, had run amuck, and Penne had killed him—possibly in self-defense—and then had grown frightened of the consequences. He remembered Stella's description. "Penne is a

bluffer and a coward at heart." That was the story in a nutshell.

"Where did you bury your unfortunate victim?" he asked coolly, and the man started.

"Bury? What do you mean?" he blustered. "I didn't murder or bury anybody. I was merely putting a hypothetical case to you."

"It sounded more real than hypothesis," said Michael, "but I won't press the question."

In truth, crimes of this character bored Michael Brixan; and, but for the unusual and curious circumstances of The Head-hunter's villainies, he would have dropped the case almost as soon as he came on to it. And there was yet another attraction which he did not name even to himself. As for Sir Gregory Penne, the grossness of the man and his hobbies, the sordid vulgarity of his associations, were more than a little sickening. He would gladly have cut Sir Gregory out of life, only—he was not yet sure.

"It is very curious how these questions crop up," Penne was saying, as he came out of his reverie. "A chap like myself, who doesn't have much to occupy his mind, gets on an abstract problem of that kind and never leaves it. So she'd be an accessory after the fact, would she? That would mean penal servitude."

He seemed to derive a great deal of satisfaction from this thought, and he was almost amiable by the time Michael parted from him, after an examination of the broken handcuffs. They were British and of an old pattern.

"Is Bhag hurt very much?" asked Michael, as he put them down.

"Not very much; he's got a cut or two," said the other calmly. He made no attempt to disguise the happenings of that night. "He came to my assistance, poor brute! This fellow nearly got him. In fact, poor old Bhag was knocked out, but went after them like a brick."

"What hat was that man wearing—the brown man?"

"Keji? I don't know. I suppose he wore a hat, but I didn't notice it. Why?"

"I was merely asking," said Michael carelessly. "Perhaps he lost it in the caves."

He watched the other narrowly, as he spoke.

"Caves? I've never heard about those. What are they? Are there any caves near by?" asked Sir Gregory innocently. "You've a wonderful grip of the topography of the county, Brixan. I've been living here off and on for twenty years, and I lose myself every time I go into Chichester!"

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE ADVERTISEMENT

THE question of the caves intrigued Michael more than any feature the case had presented. He bethought himself of Mr. Longvale, whose knowledge of the country was encyclopedic. That gentleman was out, but Michael met him, driving his antique car from Chichester. To say that he saw him is to mistake facts. The sound of that old car was audible long before it came into sight around a bend of the road. Michael drew up, Longvale following his example, and parked his car behind that ancient bus.

"Yes, it is rather noisy," admitted the old man, rubbing his bald head with a brilliant bandanna handkerchief. "I'm only beginning to realize the fact of late years. Personally I do not think that a noiseless car could give me as much satisfaction. One feels that something is happening."

"You ought to buy a—" said Michael with a smile, as he mentioned the name of a famous car.

"I thought of doing so," said the other seri-

ously, "but I love old things. That is my eccentricity."

Michael questioned him upon the caves, and, to his surprise, the old man immediately returned an affirmative.

"Yes, I've heard of them frequently. When I was a boy, my father told me that the country around here was honeycombed with caves, and that, if anybody was lucky enough to find them, they would discover great stores of brandy. Nobody has found them, as far as I know. There used to be an entrance over there." He pointed in the direction of Griff Towers. "But many years ago—"

He retold the familiar story of the landslide and of the passing out of two companies of gallant knights and squires, which probably the old man had got from the same source of information as Michael had drawn upon for his knowledge of it.

"The popular legend was that a subterranean river ran into the sea near Selsey Hill—of course, some distance beneath the surface of the water. But, as you know, country people live on such legends. In all probability it is nothing but a legend."

Inspector Lyle was waiting for the detective

when he arrived, with news of a startling character.

"The advertisement appeared in this morning's *Daily Star*," he said.

Michael took the slip of paper. It was identically worded like its predecessor:

Is your trouble of mind or body incurable? Do you hesitate on the brink of the abyss? Does your courage fail you? Write to Benefactor, Box —

"There will be no reply till tomorrow morning. Letters are to be readdressed to a shop in the Lambeth Road, and the chief wants you to be ready to pick up the trail."

The trail indeed proved to be well laid. At four o'clock on the following afternoon a lame old woman limped into the news agent's shop on the Lambeth Road and inquired for a letter addressed to Mr. Vole. There were three waiting for her. She paid the fee, put the letters into a rusty old hand bag, and limped out of the shop, mumbling and talking to herself. Passing down the Lambeth Road she boarded a tram car en route for Clapham, and near the Common she alighted and, passing out of the region of the middle-class houses, came to a jumble of tenements and ancient tumble-down dwellings.

Every corner she turned brought her to a

street meaner than the last, and finally she arrived at a low, arched alleyway, the paving of which had not been renewed for years. It was a little *cul-de-sac*, its houses, built in the same pattern, joined wall to wall, and before the last of these she stopped, took out a key from her pocket, and opened the door. She was turning to close it when she was aware that a man stood in the entrance, a tall, good-looking gentleman, who must have been on her heels all the time.

"Good afternoon, mother," he said.

The old woman peered at him suspiciously, grumbling under her breath. Only hospital doctors and workhouse folk, people connected with charity, called women "mother"; and sometimes the police got the habit. Her grimy old face wrinkled hideously at this last unpleasant thought.

"I want to have a little talk with you."

"Come in," she said shrilly.

The boarding of the passageway was broken in half a dozen places and was indescribably dirty, but it represented the spirit of pure hygiene compared with the stuffy horror which was her sitting room and kitchen.

"What are you, horspital or p'lice?"



"Police," said Michael. "I want three letters you've collected."

To his surprise the woman showed relief. "Oh, is that all?" she said. "Well, that's a job I do for a gentleman. I've done it for years. I've never had any complaint before."

"What is his name?"

"Don't know his name. Just whatever name happens to be on the letters. I send 'em on to him."

From under a heap of rubbish she produced three envelopes, addressed in typewritten characters. The typewriting Michael recognized. They were addressed to a street in Guildford.

Michael took the letters from her hand bag. Two of them he read; the third was a dummy which he himself had written. The most direct cross-examination, however, revealed nothing. The woman did the work, receiving a pound for her trouble in a letter from the unknown, who told her where the letters were to be collected.

"She was a little mad and indescribably dirty," said Michael in disgust, when he reported; "and the Guildford inquiries don't help us forward. There's another agent there, who sends the letters back to London, which they never reach. That is the mystery of the pro-

ceeding. There simply isn't such an address in London, and I can only suggest that they are intercepted on the way. The Guildford police have that matter in hand."

Staines was very worried.

"Michael I oughtn't to have put you on this job," he said. "My first thoughts were best. Scotland Yard is kicking, and they say that the meddling of outsiders is responsible for The Head-hunter not being brought to justice. You know something of departmental jealousy, and you don't need me to tell you that I'm getting more kicks than I'm entitled to."

Michael looked down at his chief reflectively. "I can get The Head-hunter, but more than ever I'm convinced that we cannot convict him until we know a little more about the caves!"

Staines frowned. "I don't quite get you, Mike. Which caves are these?"

"There are some caves in the neighborhood of Chichester. Foss knew about them and suspected their association with The Head-hunter. Give me four days, Major, and I'll have them both. And if I fail"—he paused—"if I fail, the next time you say good morning to me, I shall be looking up to you from the interior of one of The Head-hunter's boxes!"

## CHAPTER XXXI

JOHN PERCIVAL LIGGITT

It was the second day of Michael's visit to town, and, for a reason which she could not analyze, Adele felt "out" with the world. And yet the work was going splendidly, and Jack Knebworth, usually sparing of his praise, had almost rhapsodized over a little scene which she had acted with Connolly. So generous was he in his praise and so comprehensive, that even Reggie came in for his share, and Reggie was willing and ready to revise his earlier estimate of the leading lady's ability.

"I'll be perfectly frank and honest, Mr. Knebworth," he said in this moment of candor; "Leamington is good. Of course I'm always on the spot to give her tips. I feel that she pays for the coaching."

"Oh, do you?" growled the old man. "And I'd like to say the same about you, Reggie! But, unfortunately, all the coaching you've had, or ever will get, is not going to improve you."

Reggie's superior smile would have irritated one less equable than the director.

"You're perfectly right, Mr. Knebworth," he said earnestly. "I can't improve! I've touched the zenith of my power. I've had three offers to go to Hollywood, and you'll never believe who is the lady who asked me to play opposite to her."

"I don't believe any of it," said Jack even-temperedly, "but you're right to an extent about Miss Leamington. She's fine."

Later in the day Adele asked her gray-haired chief whether it was true that Reggie would soon be leaving England for another and a more ambitious sphere.

"I shouldn't think so," said Jack. "There never was an actor that hadn't a better contract up his sleeve and wasn't ready to take it."

"Has Mr. Brixan come back?"

He shook his head. "No, I've not heard from him. There was a tough-looking fellow called at the studio half an hour ago to ask whether he'd returned."

"Rather an unpleasant-looking tramp?" she asked. "I spoke to him. He said he had a letter for Mr. Brixan which he would not deliver to anybody else."

She looked through the window which commanded a view of the entrance drive to the

studio. Standing outside on the edge of the pavement was the wreck of a man. Long, lank, black hair, streaked with gray, fell from beneath the soiled and dilapidated golf cap; he was apparently shirtless, for the collar of his indescribable jacket was buttoned up to his throat; and his bare toes showed through one gaping boot.

He might have been a man of sixty, but it was difficult to arrive at his age. It looked as though the gray, stubbled beard had not met a razor since he was in prison last. His eyes were red and inflamed; his nose was that crimson which is almost blue. His hands were thrust into the pockets of trousers and seemed to be their only visible means of support, until you saw the string that was tied around his lean waist; and, as he stood, he shuffled his feet rhythmically, whistling a doleful tune. From time to time he took one of his hands from his pockets and examined the somewhat soiled envelope it held, and then, as if satisfied, put it back again and continued his jiggling vigil.

"Do you think you ought to see that letter?" asked the girl, troubled. "It may be very important."

"I thought that, too," said Jack Knebworth,

"but when I asked him to let me see the note, he just grinned."

"Do you know who it's from?"

"No more than a crow, my dear," said Knebworth patiently. "And now let's get off the all-absorbing subject of Michael Brixan to get back to the fair Roselle. That shot I took of the tower can't be bettered, so I'm going to cut out the night picture, and from now on we'll work on the lot."

The production was a heavy one, unusually so for one of Knebworth's; the settings more elaborate, the crowd bigger than ever he had handled since he came to England. It was not an easy day for the girl, and she was utterly fagged when she started homeward that night.

"Ain't seen Mr. Brixan, Miss?" said a high-pitched voice, as she reached the sidewalk.

She turned with a start. She had forgotten the existence of the tramp.

"No, he hasn't been here," she said. "You had better see Mr. Knebworth again. Mr. Brixan lives with him."

"Don't I know it? Ain't I got all the information possible about him? I should say I had!"

"He is in London; I suppose you know that?"

"He ain't in London," said the other disap-

pointedly. "If he was in London I shouldn't be hanging around here, should I? No, he left London yesterday. I'm going to wait till I see him."

She was amused by his pertinacity, though it was difficult for her to be amused at anything in the state of utter weariness into which she had fallen.

Crossing the market square she had to jump quickly to avoid being knocked down by a car which she knew was Stella Mendoza's. Stella could be at times a little reckless, and the motto upon the golden mascot on her radiator—"Jump or Die"—held a touch of sincerity.

She was in a desperate hurry now and cursed fluently, as she swung her car to avoid the girl, whom she recognized. Sir Gregory had come to his senses, and she wanted to get at him before he lost them again. She pulled up the car with a jerk at the gates of Griff Towers, flung open the door, and jumped out.

"If I don't return in two hours, you can go ~~into~~ Chichester and fetch the police," she said.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### GREGORY'S WAY

ON her table Stella had left a note to the same effect. If she did not return by a certain hour, the police were to read the letter they would find on her mantelpiece. She had not allowed for the fact that neither note nor letter would be seen until the next morning.

To Stella Mendoza the interview was one of the most important and vital in her life. She had purposely delayed her departure in the hope that Gregory Penne would take a more generous view of his obligations, though she had very little hope that he would change his mind on the all-important matter of money. And now, by some miracle, he had relented; he had spoken to her in an almost friendly tone on the phone; he had laughed at her reservations and the precautions which she promised she would take; and in the end she had overcome her natural fears.

He received her, not in his library, but in the big apartment immediately above. It was longer, for it embraced the space occupied on



the lower floor by the small drawing room; but in the matter of furnishing it differed materially. Stella had only once been in "The Splendid Hall," as he called it. Its vastness and darkness had frightened her, and the display which he had organized for her benefit was one of her unpleasant memories.

The big room was covered with a thick black carpet, and the floor space was unrelieved by any sign of furniture. Divans were set about, the walls covered with Eastern hangings; there was a row of scarlet pillars up both sides of the room, and such light as there was came from three heavily shaded black lanterns, which cast pools of yellow light upon the carpet, but did not contribute to the gayety of the room.

Penne was sitting cross-legged on a silken divan, his eyes watching the gyrations of a native girl, as she twirled and twisted to the queer sound of native guitars played by three solemn-faced men in the darkened corner of the room. Gregory wore a suit of flaming red-colored pajamas, and his glassy gaze and brute mouth told Stella all that she wanted to know about her evil friend.

Sir Gregory Penne was no less and no more than a slave to his appetites. Born a rich man,

he had never known denial of his desires. Money had grown to money in a sort of cellular progression, and when the normal pleasures of life grew stale, and he was satiated by the sweets of his possessions, he found his chiefest satisfaction in taking that which was forbidden. The raids which his agents had made from time to time in the jungles of his second home gave him trophies, human and material, that lost their value when they were under his hand.

Stella, who had visions of becoming mistress of Griff Towers, became less attractive, as she grew more complaisant. And at last her attraction had vanished, and she was no more to him than the table at which he sat.

A doctor had told him that drink would kill him, and he drank the more. Liquor brought him splendid visions, precious stories that wove themselves into dazzling fabrics of dreams. It pleased him to place in the forefront of his fuddled mind a slip of a girl who hated him. A gross bully, an equally gross coward, he could not or would not argue a theme to its logical and unpleasant conclusion. At the end there was always his money that could be paid in smaller or larger quantities to settle all grievances against him. This thought comforted him.

The native who had conducted Stella Mendoza to the apartment had disappeared, and she waited at the end of the divan, looking at the man for a long time before he took any notice of her. Presently he turned his head and favored her with a stupid, vacant stare.

"Sit down, Stella," he said thickly, "sit down. You couldn't dance like that, eh? None of you Europeans have got the grace, the suppleness. Look at her!"

The dancing girl was twirling at a furious rate, her draperies enveloping her like a cloud. Presently, with a crash of guitars, she sank face downward, on the carpet. Gregory said something in Malayan, and the woman showed her white teeth in a smile. Stella had seen her before; there used to be two dancing girls, but one had contracted scarlet fever and had been deported. Gregory had a horror of disease.

"Sit down here," he commanded, laying his hand on the divan.

As if by magic, every servant in the room had disappeared, and she suddenly felt cold.

"I've left my chauffeur outside, with instructions to go for the police if I'm not out in half an hour," she said loudly, and he laughed.

"You ought to have brought your nurse,

Stella. What's the matter with you nowadays? Can't you talk anything but police? I want to talk to you," he said in a milder tone.

"And I want to talk to you, Gregory. I am leaving Chichester for good, and I don't want to see the place again."

"That means you don't want to see me again, eh? Well, I'm pretty well through with you, and there's going to be no weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth on my part."

"My new company——" she began, and he stopped her with a gesture.

"If your new company depends upon my putting up the money, you can forget it," he said roughly. "I've seen my lawyer—at least, I've seen somebody who knows—and he tells me that, if you're trying to blackmail me about Tjarji, you're liable to get into trouble yourself. I'll put up money for you," he went on. "Not a lot, but enough. I don't suppose you're a beggar, for I've given you sufficient already to start three companies. Stella, I'm crazy about that girl, and I mean to get her, if I can."

She looked at him, her mouth open in surprise.

"What girl?" she asked.

"Adele. Isn't that her name—Adele Leamington?"

"Do you mean the extra girl that took my place?" she gasped.

He nodded, his sleepy eyes fixed on hers.

"That's it. She's my type, more than you ever were, Stella. And that isn't meant in any way disparaging to you."

She was content to listen; his declaration had taken her breath away.

"I'll go a long way to get her," he went on. "I'd marry her, if that meant anything to her. It's about time I married, anyway. Now you're a friend of hers——"

"A friend!" scoffed Stella, finding her voice. "How could I be a friend of hers when she has taken my place? And what if I were? You don't suppose I would bring a girl to this hell upon earth?"

He brought his eyes around to hers—cold, malignant, menacing.

"This hell upon earth has been heaven for you. It has given you wings, anyway! Don't go back to London, Stella, not for a week or two. Get to know this girl. You've got opportunities that nobody else has. Kid her along. You're not going to lose anything by it. Speak about me; tell her what a good fellow I am; and tell her what a chance she has. You needn't men-

tion marriage, but you can, if it helps any. Show her some of your jewels—that big pendant I gave you.”

He rambled on, and she listened, her bewilderment quickly giving place to an uncontrollable fury.

“You brute!” she said at last. “To dare suggest that I bring this girl here! I don’t like her—naturally. But I’d go down on my knees to her to beg her not to come. You think I’m jealous?” Her lips curled at the sight of the smile on his face. “That’s where you’re wrong, Gregory. I’m jealous of the position she’s taken at the studio, but, so far as you’re concerned”—she shrugged her shoulders—“you mean nothing to me. I doubt very much if you’ve ever meant more than a steady source of income. That’s candid, isn’t it?”

She got up from the divan and began putting on her gloves.

“As you don’t seem to want to help me,” she said, “I’ll have to find a way of making you keep your promise. And you did promise me a company, Gregory; I suppose you’ve forgotten that?”

“I was more interested in you then,” he said. “Where are you going?”

"I'm going back to my cottage, and tomorrow I'm returning to town," she said.

He looked first at one end of the room, then at the other, and then at her.

"You're not going back to your cottage; you're staying here, my dear," he said.

She laughed.

"You told your chauffeur to go for the police, did you? I'll tell *you* something! Your chauffeur is in my kitchen at this moment, having his supper. If you think that he's likely to leave before you, you don't know me, Stella!"

He gathered up the dressing gown that was spread on the divan and slipped his arms into the hanging sleeves. A terrible figure he was in the girl's eyes, something unclean, obscene. The scarlet pajama jacket gave his face a demoniacal value, and she felt herself cringing from him. He was quick to notice the action, and his eyes glowed with a light of triumph. He looked down at her malignantly.

"Bhag is downstairs," he said significantly. "He handles people roughly. He handled one girl so that I had to call in a doctor. You'll come with me without assistance?"

She nodded dumbly; her knees gave way under her. as she walked. She had bearded the

beast in his den once too often. Halfway along the corridor he unlocked a door of a room and pushed it open.

"Go there and stay there," he said. "I'll talk to you tomorrow, when I'm sober. I'm drunk now. Maybe I'll send some one to keep you company. I don't know yet." He ruffled his scanty hair in drunken perplexity. "But I've got to be sober before I deal with you."

The door slammed on her, and a key turned. She was in complete darkness, in a room she did not know. For one wild, terrified moment she wondered if she was alone. It was a long time before her palm touched the little button projecting from the wall. She pressed it. A lamp, enclosed in a crystal globe set in the ceiling, flashed into sparkling light. She was in what had evidently been a small bedroom. The bedstead had been removed, but a mattress and a pillow were folded up in one corner. There was a window, heavily barred, but no other exit. She examined the door; the handle turned in her grasp; there was not even a keyhole in which she could try her own key. She was forced to abandon that slight hope of escape.

Going to the window she pulled up the sash, for the room was stuffy and airless. She found



herself looking out from the back of the house, across a lawn to a belt of trees which she could just discern. The road ran parallel with the front of the house, and the shrillest scream would not be heard by anybody on the road.

Sitting down in one of the chairs, she considered her position. Having overcome her fear, she had that in her possession which would overcome Gregory if it came to a fight. Pulling up her skirt, she unbuckled the soft leather belt about her waist and, from the Russian leather holster it supported, took a diminutive Browning—a toy of a weapon, but wholly businesslike in action. Sliding back the jacket, she threw a cartridge into the chamber and pulled up the safety catch; then she examined the magazine and pressed it back again. “Now, Gregory,” she said aloud, and at that moment her face went round to the window, and she started up.

Two grimy hands gripped the bars; glaring in at her with the horrible face of a tramp. Her trembling hand shot out for the pistol, but, before it could close on the butt, the face had disappeared; and though she went round to the window and looked out, the bars prevented her from getting a clear view of the parapet along which the uncouth figure was creeping.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### "I WANT YOU"

TEN o'clock was striking from Chichester Cathedral when the tramp, who half an hour ago had been peering and prying into the secrets of Griff Towers, made his appearance in the market place. His clothes were even more dusty and soiled, and a policeman who saw him stood squarely in his path.

"On the road?" he asked.

"Yes," whined the man.

"You can get out of Chichester as quick as you like," said the officer. "Are you looking for a bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why don't you try the casual ward at the workhouse?"

"They're full up, sir."

"That's a lie," said the officer. "Now understand, if I see you again I'll arrest you!"

Muttering something to himself, the squalid figure moved on toward the Arundel Road, his shoulders hunched, his hands hidden in the

depths of his pockets. Out of sight of the policeman he turned abruptly to the right and accelerated his pace. He was making for Jack Knebworth's house. The director heard the knock, opened the door, and stood aghast at the unexpected character of the caller.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Mr. Brixan come back?"

"No, he hasn't come back. You'd better give me that letter. I'll get in touch with him by phone."

The tramp grinned and shook his head. "No, you don't. I want to see Brixan."

"Well, you won't see him here tonight," said Jack. And then suspiciously: "My idea is that you don't want to see him at all, and that you're hanging around for some other purpose."

The tramp did not reply. He was whistling softly a distorted passage from the "Indian Love Lyrics," and all the time his right foot was beating the time.

"He's in a bad way, is old Brixan," he said, and there was a certain amount of pleasure in his voice that annoyed Knebworth.

"What do you know about him?"

"I know he's in bad with headquarters—that's what I know," said the tramp. "He couldn't

find where the letters went to—that's the trouble with him. But I know."

"Is that what you want to see him about?"

The man nodded vigorously. "I know," he said again. "I could tell him something if he was here, but he ain't here."

"If you know he isn't here," asked the exasperated Jack, "why in blazes do you come?"

"Because the police are hounding me, that's why. A copper down on the market place is going to pinch me next time he sees me. So I thought I'd come up to fill in the time, that's what!"

Jack stared at him. "You've got a nerve," he said in awe-stricken tones. "And now that you've filled in your time, and I've entertained you, you can get! Do you want anything to eat?"

"Not me," said the tramp. "I live on the fat of the land, I do!"

His shrill Cockney voice was getting on Jack's nerves.

"Well, good night," he said shortly and closed the door on his unprepossessing visitor.

The tramp waited for quite a long time before he made any move. Then, from the interior of his cap, he took a cigarette and lit it before he

shuffled back the way he had come, making a long detour to avoid the center of the town, where the unfriendly policeman was on duty. A church clock was striking a quarter past ten when he reached the corner of the Arundel Road and, throwing away his cigarette, moved into the shadow of the fence and waited.

Five minutes, ten minutes passed, and his keen eyes caught sight of a man walking rapidly the way he had come, and he grinned in the darkness. It was Knebworth. Jack had been perturbed by the visitor and was on his way to the police station to make inquiries about Michael. This the tramp guessed, though he had little time to consider the director's movements, for a car came noiselessly around the corner and stopped immediately opposite him.

"Is that you, my friend?"

"Yes," said the tramp in a sulky voice.

"Come inside."

The tramp lurched forward, peering into the dark interior of the car. Then, with a turn of his wrist, he jerked open the door, put one foot on the running board, and suddenly flung himself upon the driver.

"*Mr. Head-hunter, I want you!*" he hissed.

The words were hardly out of his mouth be-

fore something soft and wet struck him in the face—something that blinded and choked him, so that he let go his grip and fought and clawed, like a dying man, at the air. A push of the driver's foot, and he was flung, breathless, to the sidewalk, and the car sped on.

Jack Knebworth had witnessed the scene, as far as it could be witnessed in the half darkness, and came running across. A policeman appeared from nowhere, and together they lifted the tramp into a sitting position.

"I've seen this fellow before tonight," said the policeman. "I warned him——"

And then the prostrate man drew a long, sighing breath, and his hands went up to his eyes.

"This is where I hand in my resignation," he said, and Knebworth's jaw dropped.

It was the voice of Michael Brixan!

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE SEARCH

"YES, it's me," said Michael bitterly. "All right, officer, you needn't wait. Jack, I'll come up to the house to get this make-up off."

"For the Lord's sake!" breathed Knebworth, staring at the detective. "I've never seen a man made up so well that he deceived me."

"I've deceived everybody, including myself," said Michael savagely. "I thought I'd caught him with a dummy letter, instead of which the devil caught me."

"What was it?"

"Ammonia, I think—a concentrated solution thereof," said Michael.

It was twenty minutes before he emerged from the bathroom, his eyes inflamed, but otherwise his old self.

"I wanted to trap him in my own way, but he was too smart for me."

"Do you know who he is?"

Michael nodded.

"Oh, yes, I know," he said. "I've got a spe-

cial force of men here, waiting to effect the arrest, but I didn't want a fuss, and I certainly did not want bloodshed. And bloodshed there will be, unless I am mistaken."

"I didn't seem to recognize the car, and I know most of the machines in this city," said Jack.

"It is a new one, used only for these midnight adventures of The Head-hunter. He probably keeps it in a garage away from his house. You asked me if I'd have something to eat just now, and I lied and told you I was living on the fat of the land. Give me some food, for the love of heaven."

Jack went into the larder and brought out some cold ham, brewed a pot of coffee, and sat in silence, watching the famished detective dispose of the viands.

"I feel a man now," said Michael, as he finished; "I've had nothing to eat except a biscuit since eleven this morning. By the way, our friend Stella Mendoza is staying at Griff Towers, and I'm afraid I rather scared her. I happened to be nosing round there an hour ago, to make absolutely sure of my bird, and I looked in upon her—to her alarm!"



There came a sharp rap at the door, and Jack Knebworth looked up.

"Who's that at this time of night?" he asked.

"Probably the policeman," said Michael.

Knebworth opened the door and found a short, stout, middle-aged woman standing on the doorstep, with a roll of paper in her hand.

"Is this Mr. Knebworth's?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jack.

"I've brought the play that Miss Leamington left behind. She asked me to bring it to you."

Knebworth took the roll of paper and slipped off the elastic band which encircled it. It was the manuscript of "Roselle."

"Why have you brought this?" he asked.

"She told me to bring it up if I found it."

"Very good," said Jack, mystified. "Thank you very much."

He closed the door on the woman and went back to the dining room.

"Adele has sent up her script. What's wrong, I wonder?"

"Who brought it?" asked Michael, interested.

"Her landlady, I suppose," said Jack, describing the woman.

"Yes, that's she. Adele is not turning in her part?"

Jack shook his head. "That wouldn't be likely."

Michael was puzzled. "What the dickens does it mean? What did the woman say?"

"She said that Miss Leamington wanted her to bring up the manuscript if she found it."

Michael was out of the house in a second and, racing down the street, overtook the woman.

"Will you come back, please?" he said, and he escorted her to the house again. "Just tell Mr. Knebworth why Miss Leamington sent this manuscript, and what you mean by having 'forgotten' it."

"Why, when she came up to you——" began the woman.

"Came up to me?" cried Knebworth quickly.

"A gentleman from the studio called for her and said you wanted to see her," said the landlady. "Miss Leamington was just going to bed, but I took up the message. He said you wanted to see her about the play and asked her to bring the manuscript. She had mislaid it somewhere and was in a great state about it, so I told her to go on, as you were in a hurry, and I'd bring it up. At least she asked me to do that."

"What sort of a gentleman was it who called?"

"A rather stout gentleman. He wasn't exactly a gentleman, he was a chauffeur. As a matter of fact, I thought he'd been drinking, though I didn't want to alarm Miss Leamington by telling her so."

"And then what happened?" asked Michael quickly.

"She came down and got in the car. The chauffeur was already in."

"A closed car, I suppose?"

The woman nodded.

"And then they drove off? What time was this?"

"Just after half past ten. I remember, because I heard the church clock strike just before the car drove up."

Michael was cool now. His voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

"Twenty-five past eleven," he said, looking at his watch. "You've been a long time coming."

"I couldn't find the paper, sir. It was under Miss Leamington's pillow. Isn't she here?"

"No, she's not here," said Michael quietly. "Thank you very much; I won't keep you. Will you wait for me at the police station?"

He went upstairs and put on his coat.

"Where do you think she is?" asked Jack.

"She is at Griff Towers," replied the other, "and whether Gregory Penne lives or dies this night depends entirely upon the treatment that Adele has received at his hands."

At the police station he found the landlady, a little frightened, more than a little tearful.

"What was Miss Leamington wearing when she went out?"

"Her blue cloak, sir," whimpered the woman, "that pretty blue cloak she always wore."

Scotland Yard men were at the station, and it was a heavily loaded car that ran out of Chichester—too heavy for Michael in a fever of impatience, for the weight of its human cargo checked its speed, and every second was precious. At last, after an eternity of time, the big car swung into the drive. Michael did not stop to waken the lodge keeper, but smashed the frail gates open with the buffers of his machine, mounted the slope, crossing the gravel parade, and halted.

There was no need to ring the bell; the door was wide open, and, at the head of his party, Brixan dashed through the deserted hall, along the corridor into Gregory's library. One light was burning, offering a feeble illumination, but the room was empty. With rapid strides he

crossed to the desk and turned the switch. Bhag's door opened, but Bhag too was an absentee. He pressed the bell by the side of the fireplace, and almost immediately the brown-faced servitor whom he had seen before came trembling in to the room.

"Where is your master?" asked Michael in Dutch.

The man shook his head. "I don't know," he replied, but instinctively he looked up to the ceiling.

"Show me the way."

They went back to the hall, up the broad stairway on to the first floor. Along a corridor, hung with swords, as was its fellow below, he reached another open door—the great dance hall where Gregory Penne had held revel that evening. There was nobody in sight, and Michael came out into the hall. As he did so, he was aware of a frantic tapping at one of the doors in the corridor. The key was in the lock; he turned it and flung the door wide open, and Stella Mendoza, white as death, staggered out.

"Where is Adele?" she gasped.

"I want to ask you that," said Michael sternly. "Where is she?"

The girl shook her head helplessly, strove to

speaking, and then collapsed in a swoon. He did not wait for her to recover, but continued his search. From room to room he went, but there was no sign of Adele or the brutal owner of Griff Towers. He searched the library again and passed through into the little drawing room, where a table was laid for two. The cloth was wet with spilt wine; one glass was half empty; but the two for whom the table was laid had vanished. They must have gone out of the front door—whither?

He was standing tense, his mind concentrated upon a problem that was more vital to him than life itself, when he heard a sound that came from the direction of Bhag's den. And then there appeared in the doorway the monstrous ape himself. He was bleeding from a wound in the shoulder; the blood fell, as he stood clutching in his two great hands something that seemed like a bundle of rags. As Michael looked, the room rocked before his eyes. The tattered, stained garment that Bhag held was the cloak that Adele Leamington had worn!

For a second Bhag glared at the man who, he knew, was his enemy, and then, dropping the cloak, he shrank back toward his quarters, his teeth bared. Three times Michael's automatic

spat, and the great, manlike thing disappeared in a flash, and the door closed with a click.

Knebworth had been a witness of the scene. It was he who ran forward and picked up the cloak that the ape had dropped.

"Yes, that was hers," he said huskily, and a horrible thought chilled him.

Michael had opened the door of the den and, pistol in hand, dashed through the opening. Knebworth dared not follow. He stood petrified, waiting, and then Michael reappeared.

"There's nothing here," he said.

"Nothing?" asked Jack Knebworth in a whisper. "Thank heaven!"

"Bhag has gone; I think I may have hit him; there is a trail of blood, but I may not be responsible for that. He had been shot recently," he pointed to stains on the floor. "He wasn't shot when I saw him last."

"Have you seen him before tonight?"

Michael nodded. "For three nights he has been haunting Longvale's house."

"Longvale's!"

Where was Adele? That was the one dominant question, the one thought uppermost in Michael Brixan's mind. And where was the baronet? What was the meaning of that open

door? None of the servants could tell him, and for some reason he saw that they were speaking the truth. Only Penne and the girl—and this great ape—knew, unless——

He hurried back to where he had left a detective trying to revive the unconscious Stella Mendoza.

"She has passed from one fainting fit to another," said the officer. "I can get nothing out of her except that once she said, 'Kill him, Adele.'"

"Then she has seen her?" said Michael.

One of the officers he had left outside to watch the building had a report to make. He had seen a dark figure climb the wall and disappear apparently through the solid brickwork. A few minutes later it had come out again.

"That was Bhag," said Michael. "I knew he was not here when we arrived. He must have come in through the opening, while we were upstairs."

The car that had carried Adele had been found. It was Stella's and at first Michael suspected that the girl was a party to the abduction. He learned afterward that, whilst the woman's chauffeur had been in the kitchen, virtually a prisoner, Penne himself had driven the



car to the girl's house, and it was the sight of the machine, which Adele knew belonged to Stella, that had lulled any suspicions she may have had.

Michael was in a condition bordering upon frenzy. The Head-hunter and his capture were insignificant compared with the safety of the girl.

"If I don't find her I shall go mad," he said.

Jack Knebworth had opened his lips to answer, when there came a startling interruption. Borne on the still night air came a scream of agony which turned the director's blood to ice.

"Help, help!"

Shrill as was the cry, Michael knew that it was the voice of a man, and he knew that that man was Gregory Penne!

## CHAPTER XXXV

### WHAT HAPPENED TO ADELE

THERE were moments when Adele Leamington had doubts as to her fitness for the profession she had entered; and never were those periods of doubt more poignant than when she tried to fix her mind upon the written directions of the scenario. She blamed Michael, but immediately she became repentant. She blamed herself more freely; and at last she gave up the struggle, rolled up the manuscript book and, putting an elastic band about it, thrust it under her pillow and prepared for bed. She had rid herself of skirt and blouse when the summons came.

"From Mr. Knebworth?" she said in surprise. "At this time of night?"

"Yes, Miss. He's going to make a big alteration tomorrow, and he wants to see you at once. He has sent his car. Miss Mendoza is coming into the cast."

"Oh!" she said faintly.

Then she had been a failure, after all, and she had lived in a fool's paradise for these past days.

"I'll come at once," she said.

Her fingers trembled, as she fastened her dress, and she hated herself for such a display of weakness. Perhaps Stella was not coming into the cast in her old part; perhaps some new character had been written in; perhaps it was not for "Roselle" at all that she had been reëngaged. These and other speculations rioted in her mind; and she was in the passage, and the door was opened, when she remembered that Jack Knebworth would want the manuscript. She ran upstairs and, by an aberration of memory, forgot entirely where the script had been left. At last, in despair, she went down to the landlady.

"I have left some manuscripts which are rather important. Would you bring them up to Mr. Knebworth's house when you find them? They're in a little brown jacket." She described the appearance of the jacket as well as she could.

It was Stella Mendoza's car; she recognized the machine with a pang. So Jack and she were reconciled! In a minute she was inside the machine, the door closed behind her, and she was sitting by the driver, who did not speak to her.

"Is Mr. Brixan with Mr. Knebworth?" she asked.

He did not reply. She thought he had not heard her, until he turned with a wide sweep and set the car going in the opposite direction.

"This is not the way to Mr. Knebworth's," she said in alarm. "Don't you know the way?"

Still he made no reply. The machine gathered speed, passed down a long, dark street, and turned into a country lane.

"Stop the car at once!" she said terrified, and she put her hand on the handle of the door as if to open it.

Instantly her arm was gripped.

"My dear, you're going to injure your pretty little body, and probably you'll spoil your beautiful face, if you attempt to get out while the car is in motion," he said.

"Sir Gregory!" she gasped.

"Now don't make a fuss," said Gregory. There was no mistaking the elation in his voice. "You're coming up to have a little bit of supper with me. I've asked you often enough, and now you're going willy-nilly! Stella's there, so there's nothing to be afraid of."

She held down her fears with an effort.

'Sir Gregory, you will take me back at once

to my lodgings," she said. "This is disgraceful of you!"

He chuckled loudly. "Nothing's going to happen to you; nobody's going to hurt you, and you'll be delivered safe and sound; but you're going to have supper with me first, little darling. And if you make a fuss, I'm going to turn the car into the first tree I see and smash us all up!"

He was drunk—drunk not only with wine, but with a sense of his power. Gregory had achieved his object and would stop at nothing now.

Was Stella there? She did not believe him. And yet it might be true. She grasped at the straw which Stella's presence offered.

"Here we are," grunted Gregory, as he stopped the car before the door of The Towers and slipped out to the gravel.

Before she realized what he was doing, he had lifted her in his arms. though she struggled desperately.

"If you scream I'll kiss you," growled his voice in her ear, and she lay passive.

The door opened instantly. She looked down at the servant standing stolidly in the hall, as Gregory carried her up the wide stairway, and

wondered what help might come from him. Presently Penne set her down on her feet and, opening a door, thrust her in.

"Here's your friend, Stella," he said. "Say the good word for me! Knock some sense into her head if you can. I'll come back in ten minutes, and we'll have the grandest little wedding supper that any bridegroom ever had."

The door was banged and locked upon her before she realized there was another woman in the room. It was Stella. Her heart rose at the sight of the girl's white face.

"Oh, Miss Mendoza," she said breathlessly, "**thank** heaven you're **here!**"

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE ESCAPE

"DON'T start thanking heaven too soon," said Stella with ominous calm. "Oh, you little fool, why did you come here?"

"He brought me. I didn't want to come," said Adele.

She was half hysterical in her fright. She tried hard to imitate the calm of her companion, biting her quivering lips to keep them still, and after a while she was calm enough to tell what had happened. Stella's face clouded.

"Of course, he took my car," she said, speaking to herself, "and he has caught the chauffeur, as he said he would. Oh, my Lord!"

"What will he do?" asked Adele in a whisper.

Stella's fine eyes turned on the girl. "What do you think he will do?" she asked significantly. "He's a beast—the kind of beast you seldom meet except in books and locked rooms. He'll have no more mercy on you than Bhag would have on you."

"If Michael knows, he will kill him."

"Michael? Oh, Brixan, you mean?" said

Stella with newly awakened interest. "Is he fond of you? Is that why he hangs around the lot? That never struck me before. But what does Gregory care about Michael or any other man? He can run; his yacht is at Southampton, and he depends a lot upon his wealth to get him out of this kind of scrapes. And he knows that decent women shrink from appearance in a police court. Oh, he's got all sorts of defenses."

"What shall I do?"

Stella was walking up and down the narrow apartment, her hands clasped before her, her eyes sunk to the ground.

"I don't think he'll hurt me." And then inconsequently she went off at a tangent: "I saw a tramp at that window two hours ago."

"A tramp?" said the bewildered girl.

Stella nodded. "It scared me terribly, until I remembered his eyes. They were Brixan's eyes, though you'd never guess it, the make-up was so wonderful."

"Michael? Is he here?" asked the girl eagerly.

"He's somewhere around. That is your salvation, and there's another."

She took down from a shelf a small Browning. "Did you ever fire a pistol?"



The girl nodded. "I have to, in one scene," she said a little awkwardly.

"Of course! Well, this is loaded. That"—she pointed—"is the safety catch. Push it down with your thumb before you start to use it. You had better kill Penne—better for you and better for him, I think."

Adele shrank back in horror. "Oh, no, no!"

"Put it in your pocket. Have you a pocket?"

There was one inside the blue cloak the girl was wearing, and into this Stella dropped the pistol.

"You don't know what sort of sacrifice I'm making," she said frankly, "and it isn't as though I'm doing it for somebody I'm fond of, because I'm not particularly fond of you, Adele Leamington. But I wouldn't be fit to live if I let that brute get you without a struggle."

And then impulsively she stooped forward and kissed the girl, and Adele put her arms about her neck.

"He's coming," whispered Stella Mendoza and stepped back with a gesture.

It was Gregory—Gregory in his purple dressing gown, his face aflame, his eyes fired with excitement.

"Come on, you!" He crooked his finger.

"Not you, Mendoza—you stay here, eh? You can see her after—perhaps—after supper."

He leered down at the shrinking girl. "Nobody's going to hurt you. Leave your cloak here."

"No, I'll wear it," she said.

Her hand went instinctively to the butt of the pistol and closed upon it.

"All right, come as you are. It makes no difference to me."

He held her tightly by the hand and marched by her side, surprised and pleased that she offered so little resistance. Down into the hall they went and then to the little drawing room adjoining his study. He flung open the door and showed her the gayly decorated table, pushing her into the room before him.

"Wine and a kiss!" he roared, as he pulled the cork from a champagne bottle and sent the amber fluid splashing upon the spotless tablecloth. "Wine and a kiss!" He splashed the glass out to her, so that it spilled and trickled down her cloak.

She shook her head mutely.

"Drink!" he snarled, and she touched the glass with her lips.

Then, before she could realize what had hap-

pened, she was caught in his arms. She tried to escape from the arresting circle of his embrace and successfully averted her face. Presently he let her go and, staggering to the door, kicked it shut. His fingers were closing on the key, when she exclaimed:

"If you turn that key I'll kill you."

He looked up in ludicrous surprise, and at the sight of the pistol his big hands waved before his face in fear.

"Put it down, you fool!" he called. "Put it down! Don't you know what you're doing? The infernal thing may go off by accident."

"It will not go off by accident," she said. "Open that door."

He hesitated for a moment, and then her thumb tightened on the safety catch, and he must have seen the movement.

"Don't shoot—don't shoot!" he screamed and flung the door wide open. "Wait, you fool! Don't go out. Bhag is there. Bhag will get you. Stay with me, I'll——"

But she was flying down the corridor. She slipped on a loose rug in the hall, but recovered herself. Her trembling hands were working at the bolts and chains; the door swung open, and in another instant she was in the open, free.

Sir Gregory followed her. The shock of her escape had sobered him, and all the tragic consequences which might follow came crowding in upon him, until his very soul writhed in fear. Dashing back to his study, he opened his safe and took out a bundle of notes. These he thrust into the pocket of a fur-lined overcoat that was hanging in a cupboard and put it on. He changed his slippers for thick shoes and then bethought him of Bhag. He opened the den, but Bhag was not there, and he raised his shaking fingers to his lips.

If Bhag caught her!

Some glimmering of a lost manhood stirred dully in his mind. He must first be sure of Bhag. He went out into the darkness in search of his strange and horrible servant. Putting both hands to his mouth, he emitted a long and painful howl, the call that Bhag had never yet disobeyed, and then he waited. There was no answer. Again he sent forth the melancholy sound, but, if Bhag heard him, for the first time in his life he did not obey.

Gregory Penne stood in an agony of fear, but, so standing, recovered some of his balance. There was time to change. He went up to his ornate bedroom, flung off his dressing gown,

and in a short space of time was down again in the dark grounds, seeking for the ape.

A long glass of whiskey restored some of his confidence. He rang for the servant who was in charge of his car.

"Have the machine by the postern gate," he said. "Get it there at once. See that the gate is open; I may have to leave tonight."

That he would be arrested, he did not doubt. Not all his wealth, his position, the pull he had in the county, could save him. This latest deed of his was something more than eccentricity. Then he remembered that Stella Mendoza was still in the house, and he went up to see her. A glance at his face told her that something unusual had happened.

"Where is Adele?" she asked instantly.

"I don't know. She escaped; she had a pistol. Bhag went after her. Heaven knows what will happen if he finds her. He'll tear her limb from limb. What's that?"

It was the faint sound of a pistol shot at a distance, and it came from the back of the house.

"Poachers," said Gregory uneasily. "Listen, I'm going."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"That's no business of yours," he snarled. "Here's some money." He thrust some notes into her hand.

"What have you done?" she whispered in horror.

"I've done nothing, I tell you," he stormed. "But they'll take me for it. I'm going to get to the yacht. You'd better clear before they come."

She was collecting her hat and gloves when she heard the door close, and the key turn. Mechanically he had locked her in, and mechanically he took no heed of her beating hand upon the panel of the door.

Griff Towers stood on high ground and commanded a view of the back road from Chichester. As he stood in the front of the house, hoping against hope that he would see the ape, he saw instead two lights come rapidly along the road.

"The police!" he croaked and went blundering across the kitchen garden to the gate.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE TOWER

ADELE went flying down the drive, intent only upon one object, to escape from this horrible house. The gates were closed; the lodge was in darkness; and she strove desperately to unfasten the iron catch, but it held. Looking back toward the oblong of light which represented the tower door, she was dimly aware of a figure moving stealthily along the grass that bordered each side of the roadway. For a moment she thought it was Gregory Penne, and then the true explanation of that skulking shape came to her, and she nearly dropped. It was Bhag!

She moved as quietly as she could along the side of the wall, creeping from bush to bush; but he had seen her, and came in pursuit, moving slowly, cautiously, as though he was not quite sure that she was legitimate prey. Perhaps there was another gate, she thought, and continued, glancing over her shoulder from time to time, and gripping the little pistol in

her hand with such intensity that it was slippery with perspiration before she had gone a hundred yards.

Now she left the cover of the wall and came across a meadow, and at first she thought that she had slipped her pursuer. But Bhag seldom went into the open, and presently she saw him again. He was parallel with her, walking under the wall, and showing no sign of hurry. Perhaps, she thought, if she continued, he would drop his pursuit and go off. It might be curiosity that kept him on her trail. But this hope was disappointed. She crossed a stile and followed a path until she realized it was bringing her nearer and nearer to the wall where her watcher was keeping pace with her. As soon as she realized this, she turned abruptly from the path and found herself walking through dew-laden grasses. She was wet to the knees before she had gone far, but she did not even know this. Bhag had left cover and was following her into the open!

She wondered if the grounds were entirely enclosed by a wall, and she was relieved when she came to a low fence. Stumbling down a bank on to a road which was evidently the eastern boundary of the property, she ran at full



speed, though where the road led she could not guess. Glancing back, she saw to her horror that Bhag was following, yet making no attempt to decrease the distance which separated them.

And then, far away, she saw the lights of a cottage. They seemed close at hand, but were in reality more than two miles distant. With a sob of thankfulness she turned from the road and ran up a gentle slope, only to discover to her dismay, when she reached the crest, that the lights seemed as far away as ever. Looking back, she saw Bhag, his green eyes gleaming in the darkness.

Where was she? Glancing round, she found an answer. Ahead and to the left was the squat outline of old Griff tower.

And then, for some reason, Bhag dropped his rôle of interested watcher, and, with a dog-like growl, leaped at her. She flew upward toward the tower, her breath coming in sobs, her heart thumping so that she felt every moment she would drop from sheer exhaustion. A hand clutched at her cloak and tore it from her. That gave her a moment's respite. She must face her enemy, or she herself must perish.

Spinning round, her shaking pistol raised, she confronted the monster, who was growling and

tearing at the clothing in his hand. Again he crouched to spring, and she pressed the trigger. The unexpected loudness of the explosion so startled her that she nearly dropped the pistol. With a howl of anguish he fell, gripping at his wounded shoulder, but rose again immediately. And then he began to move backward, watching her all the time.

What should she do? In her present position he might creep from bush to bush and pounce upon her at any moment. She looked up at the tower. If she could reach the top! And then she remembered the ladder that Jack Knebworth had left behind. But that would have been collected.

She moved stealthily, keeping her eye upon the ape, and, though he was motionless, she knew he was watching her. Then, groping in the grass, her fingers touched the light ladder, and she lifted it without difficulty and placed it against the wall. She had heard Jack say that the ape could not have climbed the tower from the outside without assistance, though it had been an easy matter, with the aid of the trees growing against the wall inside, for him to get out.

Bhag was still visible; the dull glow of his

eyes was dreadful to see. With a wild run she reached the top of the ladder and began pulling it up after her. Bhag crept nearer and nearer till he came to the foot of the tower, made three ineffectual efforts to scale the wall and failed. She heard his twitter of rage and guided the ladder to the inside of the tower.

For a long time they sat looking at one another, the orang-outang and the girl. And then Bhag crept away. She followed him as far as her keen eyes could distinguish his ungainly shape, waiting until she was certain he had gone, and then she reached for the ladder. The lower rung must have caught in one of the bushes below. She tugged, tugged again, tugged for the third time, and it came away so smoothly that she lost her balance. For a second she was holding the top of the wall with one hand, the ladder with the other; then, half sliding, half tumbling, she came down with a run and picked herself up, breathless. She could have laughed at the mishap, but for the eerie loneliness of her new surroundings. She tried to erect the ladder again but in the dark it was impossible to get a firm foundation.

There must be small stones somewhere about, and she began to look for them. She reached

the bottom of the circular depression and, pushing aside a bush to make further progress, feeling all the time with her feet for a suitable prop, suddenly she slipped. She was dropping down a sloping shaft into the depths of the earth!

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE CAVERN OF BONES

DOWN, down, down she fell, one hand clawing wildly at the soft earth, the other clenching unconsciously at the tiny pistol. She was rolling down a steep slope. Once her feet came violently and painfully into contact with an out-jutting rock, and the shock and the pain of it turned her sick and faint. Whither she was going, she dared not think. It seemed an eternity before she struck a level floor and, rolling over and over, was brought up against a rocky wall, with a jolt that shook the breath from her body.

Eternity it seemed, yet it could not have been more than a few seconds. For five minutes she lay, recovering, on the rock floor. She got up with a grimace of pain, felt her hurt ankle, and worked her foot to discover if anything was broken. Looking up, she saw a pale star above, and, guessing that it was the opening through which she had fallen, attempted to climb back; but, with every step she took, the soft earth gave under her feet, and she slipped back again.

She had lost a shoe; that was the first tangible truth that asserted itself. She groped around in the darkness and found it after a while, half imbedded in the earth. She shook it empty, dusted her stockinged foot, and put it on. Then she sat down to wonder what she would do next. She guessed that, with the coming of day, she would be able to examine her surroundings, and she must wait, with what philosophy she could summon, for the morning to break.

It was then that she became conscious that she was still gripping the earth-caked Browning, and, with a half-smile, she cleaned it as best she could, pressed down the safety catch and, putting the weapon inside her blouse, thrust its blunt nose into the waistband of her skirt.

The mystery of Bhag's reappearance was now a mystery no longer. He had been hiding in the cave, though it was her imagination that supplied the queer animal scent which was peculiarly his. How far did the cave extend? She peeped left and right, but could see nothing; then, groping cautiously, feeling every inch of her way, her hand struck a stone pillar, and she withdrew it quickly, for it was wet and clammy.

And then she made a discovery of the greatest importance to her. She was feeling along the

wall when her hand went into a niche, and by the surface of its shelf she knew that it was man-fashioned. She put her hand farther along, and her heart leaped, as she touched something which had a familiar and homely feel. It was a lantern. Her other hand went up, and presently she opened its glass door and felt a length of candle, and, at the bottom of the lantern, a small box of matches.

It was no miracle, as she was to learn; but for the moment it seemed that that possibility of light had come in answer to her unspoken prayers. Striking a match with a hand that shook, so that the light went out immediately, she at last succeeded in kindling the wick. The candle was new, and at first its light was feeble; but presently the wax began to burn, and, closing the lantern door, her surroundings came into view.

She was in a narrow cave, from the roof of which hung innumerable stalactites; but the dripping water which is inseparable from this queer formation was absent at the foot of the opening where she had tumbled. Farther along the floor was wet, and a tiny stream of water ran in a sort of naturally carved tunnel on one side of the path. Here, where the cave broad-

ened, the stalactites were many and at such regular intervals and of such even shape that they seemed almost to have been sculptured by human agency; there were little caves within caves, narrow openings that revealed in the light of her lantern the splendor of nature's treasures. Fairylike grottoes, rich with delicate stone traceries; tiny lakes that sparkled in the light of the lantern. Broader and broader grew the cave, until she stood in a huge chamber that appeared to be festooned with frozen lace. And here the floor was littered with queer white sticks. There were thousands of them, of every conceivable shape and size. They showed whitely in the gleam of her lantern in the crevices of the rocks. She stooped and picked one up, dropping it quickly with a cry of horror. They were human bones!

With a shuddering gasp she half walked, half ran across the great cavern, which began to narrow again and assumed the appearance of that portion of the cave into which she had fallen. And here she saw, in another niche, a second lantern, with new candle and matches. Who had placed them there? The first lantern she had not dared to think about; it belonged to the category of the miraculous. But the second



brought her up with a jerk. Who had placed these lanterns at intervals along the wall of the cave, as if in preparation for an expected emergency? There must be somebody who lived down here. She breathed a little more quickly at the thought.

Going on slowly, she examined every foot of the way, the second lantern, unlighted, slung on her arm. At one place the floor was flooded with running water; at another she had to wade through a little subterranean ford, where the water came over her ankles. And now the cave was curving imperceptibly to the right. From time to time she stopped and listened, hoping to hear the sound of a human voice, and yet fearing. The roof of the cave came lower. There were signs in the roof that the stalactites had been knocked off to afford head room for the mysterious person who haunted these underground chambers.

Once she stopped, her heart thumping painfully at the sound of footsteps. They passed over her head, and then came a curious humming sound that grew in intensity, passed and faded. A motor car! She was under the road! Of course old Griff tower stood upon the hillside. She was now near the road level, and pos-

sibly eight or nine feet above her the stars were shining. She looked wistfully at the ragged surface of the roof, and, steeling herself against the terrors that rose within her, she went on. She had need of nerve, need of courage beyond the ordinary.

The cave passage turned abruptly; the little grotto openings in the wall occurred again. Suddenly she stopped dead. The light of the lantern showed into one of the grottoes. Two men lay side by side.

She stifled the scream that rose to her lips, pressing her hands firmly upon her mouth, her eyes shut tightly to hide the sight. They were dead—headless! Lying in a shallow pool, the petrifying water came dripping down upon them, as it would drip down unceasingly until these pitiful things were stone.

For a long time she dared not move, dared not open her eyes, but at last her will conquered, and she looked with outward calm upon a sight that froze her very marrow. The next grotto was similarly tenanted, only this time there was one man. And then, when she was on the point of sinking under the shock, a tiny point of light appeared in the gloom ahead. It

moved and swayed, and there came to her the sound of a fearful laugh.

She acted instantly. Pulling open the door of the lantern, she stopped and blew it out, and stood, leaning against the wall of the cave, oblivious to the grisly relics that surrounded her, conscious only of the danger which lay ahead. Then a brighter light blazed up and another, till the distant spaces were as bright as day. As she stood, wondering, there came to her a squeal of mortal agony and a whining voice that cried:

"Help! Oh, Lord, help! Brixan, I am not fit to die!"

It was the voice of Sir Gregory Penne.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### MICHAEL KNOWS FOR SURE

It was that same voice that had brought Michael Brixan racing across the garden to the postern gate. A car stood outside, its lights dimmed. Standing at its head was a frightened little brown man who had brought the machine to the place.

"Where is your master?" asked Michael quickly.

The man pointed.

"He went that way," he quavered. "There was a devil in the big machine—it would not move when he stamped on the little pedal."

Michael guessed what had happened. At the last moment, by one of those queer mischances which haunt the just and the unjust, the engine had failed him, and he had fled on foot.

"Which way did he go?"

Again the man pointed. "He ran," he said simply.

Michael turned to the detective who was with him. "Stay here; he may return. Arrest him

immediately and put the irons on him. He's probably armed and he may be suicidal; we can't afford to take any risks."

He had been so often across what he had named the "Back Field" that he could find his way blindfolded, and he ran at top speed till he came to the stile and to the road. Sir Gregory was nowhere in sight. Fifty yards along the road the lights gleamed cheerily from an upper window in Mr. Longvale's house, and Michael bent his footsteps in that direction.

Still no sight of the man, and he turned through the gate and knocked at the door, which was almost immediately opened by the old man himself. He wore a silken gown, tied with a sash about the middle, a picture of comfort, Michael thought.

"Who's that?" asked Mr. Sampson Longvale, peering out into the darkness. "Why, bless my life, it's Mr. Brixan, the officer of the law! Come in, come in, sir."

He opened the door wide, and Michael passed into the sitting room, with its inevitable two candles, augmented now by a small silver reading lamp.

"No trouble at the Towers, I trust?" said Mr. Longvale anxiously.

"There was a little trouble," said Michael carefully. "Have you by any chance seen Sir Gregory Penne?"

Longvale shook his head. "I found the night rather too chilly for my usual garden ramble," he said, "so I've seen none of the exciting events which seem inevitably to accompany the hours of darkness in these times. Has anything happened to him?"

"I hope not," said Michael quietly. "I hope, for everybody's sake, that nothing has happened to him."

He walked across and leaned his elbows on the mantelpiece, looking up at the painting above his head.

"Do you admire my relative?" beamed Mr. Longvale.

"I don't know that I admire him. He was certainly wonderfully handsome."

Mr. Longvale inclined his head. "You have read his memoirs?"

Michael nodded, and the old man did not seem in any way surprised.

"Yes, I have read what purport to be his memoirs," said Michael quietly, "but latter-day opinion is that they are not authentic."

Mr. Longvale shrugged his shoulders. "Per-

sonally I believe every word of them," he said. "My uncle was a man of considerable education."

It would have amazed Jack Knebworth to know that the man who had rushed from the tower in search of a possible murderer, was at that moment calmly discussing biography; yet such was the incongruous, unbelievable fact.

"I sometimes feel that you think too much about your uncle, Mr. Longvale," said Michael gently.

The old gentleman frowned. "You mean—"

"I mean that such a subject may become an obsession and a very unhealthy obsession, and such hero worship may lead a man to do things which no sane man would do."

Longvale looked at him in genuine astonishment. "Can one do better than imitate the deeds of the great?"

"Not if your sense of values hasn't got all tangled up, and you ascribe to him virtues which are not virtues—unless duty is a virtue, and you confuse that which is great with that which is terrible."

Michael turned and, resting his palms on the table, looked across to the old man who confronted him.

"I want you to come with me into Chichester this evening."

"Why?" The question was asked bluntly.

"Because I think you're a sick man, that you ought to have care."

The old man laughed and drew himself even more erect. "Sick? I was never better in my life, my dear sir, never fitter, never stronger!"

And he looked all that he said. His height, the breadth of his shoulders, the healthy glow of his cheeks, all spoke of physical fitness.

A long pause, and then. "Where is Gregory Penne?" asked Michael, emphasizing every word.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

The old man's eyes met his without wavering. "We were talking about my great-uncle. You know him, of course?" he asked.

"I knew him the first time I saw his picture, and I thought I had betrayed my knowledge, but apparently I did not. Your great-uncle"—Michael spoke deliberately—"was Sanson, otherwise Longval, hereditary executioner of France!"

Such a silence followed that the ticking of a distant clock sounded distinctly.

"Your uncle has many achievements to his



credit. He hanged three men on a gallows sixty feet high, unless my memory is at fault. His hand struck off the head of Louis of France and his consort, Marie Antoinette."

The look of pride in the old man's face was startling. His eyes kindled, and he seemed to grow in height.

"By what fantastic freak of fate you have settled in England, what queer kink of mind decided you secretly to carry on the profession of Sanson and seek far and wide for poor helpless wretches to destroy, I do not know."

Michael did not raise his voice; he spoke in a calm, conversational tone; and in the same way did Longvale reply.

"Is it not better," he said gently, "that a man should pass out of life through no act of his own than that he should commit the unpardonable crime of self-murder? Have I not been a benefactor to men who dared not take their own lives?"

"To Lawley Foss?" suggested Michael, his grave eyes fixed on the other.

"He was a traitor, a vulgar blackmailer, a man who sought to use the knowledge which had accidentally come to him to extract money from me."

"Where is Gregory Penne?"

A slow smile dawned on the man's face.

"You will not believe me? That is ungente, sir! I have not seen Sir Gregory."

Michael pointed to the hearth, where a cigarette was still smoldering.

"There is that," he said. "There are his muddy footprints on the carpet of this room. There is the cry I heard. Where is he?"

Within reach of his hand was his heavy-caliber Browning. A move on the old man's part, and he would lie maimed on the ground. Michael was dealing with a homicidal lunatic of the most dangerous type, and he would not hesitate to shoot.

But the old man showed no sign of antagonism. His voice was gentleness itself. He seemed to feel and express a pride in crimes which, to his brain, were not crimes at all.

"If you really wish me to go into Chichester with you tonight, of course I will go," he said. "You may be right in your own estimation, even in the estimation of your superiors, but, in ending my work, you are rendering a cruel disservice to miserable humanity, to serve which I have spent thousands of pounds. But I bear no malice."

He took a bottle from the long, oaken buffet against the wall, selected two glasses with scrupulous care, and filled them from the bottle.

"We will drink our mutual good health," he said with his old courtesy; and, lifting his glass to his lips, he drank it with that show of enjoyment with which the old-time lovers of wine marked their approval of rare vintages.

"You're not drinking?" he said in surprise.

"Somebody else has drunk."

There was a glass half empty on the buffet; Michael saw it for the first time. "He did not seem to enjoy the wine."

Mr. Longvale sighed. "Very few people understand wine," he said, dusting a speck from his coat. Then, drawing a silk handkerchief from his pocket, he stooped and dusted his boots daintily.

Michael was standing on a strip of rug in front of the fireplace, his hand on his gun; he was prepared for the moment of trial. Whence the danger would come, what form it would take, he could not guess. But that danger was there—danger terrible and ruthless, emphasized rather than relieved by the quiet suavity of the old man's tone, he felt in the creep of his flesh.

"You see, my dear sir," Longvale went on, still dusting his boots, "I cannot—"

And then, before Michael could realize what had happened, he had grasped the end of the rug on which the detective was standing and pulled it with a quick jerk toward him. Before he could balance himself, Michael had fallen with a crash to the floor, his head striking the oaken paneling, his pistol sliding along the polished floor. In a flash the old man was on him, had flung him over on his face, and dragged his hands behind him. Michael tried to struggle, but he was as a child in that powerful grip, placed at such a disadvantage as he was. He felt the touch of cold steel on his wrists; there was a click; and, exerting all his strength, he tried to pull the other hand away. But gradually, slowly it was forced back, and the second cuff snapped.

There were footsteps on the path outside the cottage. The old man straightened himself to pull off his silken gown and wrapped it round and round the detective's head, and then a knock came at the door. One glance to see that his prisoner was safe, and Longvale extinguished the lamp, blew out one of the candles, and carried the other into the passage.

He was in his shirt sleeves, and the Scotland Yard officer who was the caller apologized for disturbing a man who had apparently been brought down from his bedroom to answer the knock.

"Have you seen Mr. Brixan?"

"Mr. Brixan? Yes, he was here a few minutes ago. He went on to Chichester."

Michael heard the voices, but could not distinguish what was being said. The silken gown about his head was suffocating him, and he was losing his senses when the old man came back alone, unfastened the gown, and put it on himself.

"If you make a noise, I will sew your lips together," he said, so naturally and good-naturedly that it seemed impossible he would carry his threat into execution. But Michael knew that he was giving chapter and verse; he was threatening that which his ancestor had often performed. That beautiful old man, nicknamed by the gallants of Louis' court "Monsieur de Paris," had broken and hanged and beheaded, but he had also tortured men. There were smoke-blackened rooms in the old Bastille where that venerable old hangman had performed nameless duties without blenching.

"I am sorry in many ways that you must go on," said the old man, with genuine regret in his voice. "You are a young man for whom I have a great deal of respect. The law to me is sacred, and its officers have an especially privileged place in my affections."

He pulled open a drawer of the buffet and took out a large napkin, folded it with great care and fixed it tightly about Michael's mouth. Then he raised him up and sat him on a chair.

"If I were a young and agile man, I might have a jest which would have pleased my uncle, Charles Henry. I would fix your head on the top of the gates of Scotland Yard! I've often examined the gates with that idea in my mind. Not that I thought of you, but that some day Providence might send me a very high official, a minister, even a prime minister. My uncle, as you know, was privileged to destroy kings and leaders of parties—Danton, Robespierre, every great leader save Murat. Danton was the greatest of them all."

There was an excellent reason why Michael should not answer. But he was his own cool self again; and, though his head was aching from the violent knock it had received, his mind was clear. He was waiting now for the next

move and suspected he would not be kept waiting long. What scenes had this long dining room witnessed! What moments of agony, mental and physical! It was the very antechamber to death.

Here, then, Bhag must have been rendered momentarily unconscious. Michael guessed the lure of drugged wine, that butyl chloride which was part of the murderer's equipment. But for once Longvale had misjudged the strength of his prey. Bhag must have followed the brown folk to Dower House—the man and woman whom the old man in his cunning had spared.

Michael was soon to discover what was going to happen. The old man opened the door of the buffet and took out a great steel hook, at the end of which was a pulley. Reaching up, he slipped the end of the hook into a steel bolt and fastened in one of the overhead beams. Michael had noticed it before and wondered what purpose it served.

From the cupboard came a long coil of rope, one end of which was threaded through the pulley and fastened dexterously under the detective's armpits. Stooping, Longvale lifted the carpet and rolled it up, and then Michael saw that there was a small trapdoor, which the old

man raised and laid back. Below, he could see nothing, but there came to him the sound of a man's groaning.

"Now, I think we can dispense with that, sir," said Mr. Longvale, and he untied the napkin that covered the detective's mouth.

This done, he pulled on the rope, seemingly without an effort, and Michael swung in mid-air. It was uncomfortable; he had an absurd notion that he looked a little ridiculous. The old man guided his feet through the opening and gradually paid out the rope.

"Will you be good enough to tell me when you touch ground," he asked, "and I will come down to you."

Looking up, Michael saw the square in the floor grow smaller and smaller, and for an unconscionable time he swung and swayed and turned in mid-air. He thought he was not moving, and then, without warning, his feet touched ground, and he called out.

"Are you all right?" said Mr. Longvale pleasantly. "Do you mind stepping a few paces on one side? I am dropping the rope, and it may hurt you."

Michael gasped, but carried out instructions, and presently he heard the swish of the falling



line and the smack of it, as it struck the ground. Then the trapdoor closed, and there was no other sound but a groaning near at hand.

"Is that you, Penne?"

"Who is it?" asked the other in a frightened voice. "Is it you, Brixan? Where are we? What has happened? How did I get here? That old devil gave me a drink. I ran out—and that's all I remember. I went to borrow his car. My Lord, I'm scared! The magneto of mine went wrong."

"Did you shout when you ran from the house?"

"I think I did. I felt this infernal poison taking effect, and I dashed out. I don't remember much more. Where are you, Brixan. The police will get us out of this, won't they?"

"Alive, I hope," said Michael grimly, and he heard the man's frightened sob, and he was sorry he had spoken.

"What is he? Who is he? Are these the caves? I've heard about them. It smells horribly earthy, doesn't it? Can you see anything?"

"I thought I saw a light just then," said Michael, "but my eyes are playing tricks." And then: "Where is Adele Leamington?"

"God knows," said the other. He was shiv-

ering, and Michael heard the sound of his chattering teeth. "I never saw her again. I was afraid Bhag would go after her. But he wouldn't hurt her; he is a queer devil. I wish he was here."

"I wish somebody was here," said Michael sincerely.

He was trying to work his wrists loose of the handcuffs, though he knew that barehanded he stood very little chance against the old man. He had lost his pistol; and, although in the inside of his waistcoat there remained intact the long, sharp knife that had cleared him out of many a Continental scrape, the one infallible weapon when firearms failed, he knew that he would have no opportunity for its employment.

Sitting down, he tried to perform a trick that he had seen on a stage in Berlin—the trick of bringing his legs through his manacled hands and so getting his hands in front of him, but he struggled without avail. There came the sound of a door opening and Mr. Longvale's voice.

"I won't keep you a moment," he said. He carried a lantern in his hand that swung, as he walked, and he seemed to intensify the gloom. "I don't like my patients to catch cold."

His laughter came echoing back from the vaulted roof of the cave, intensified hideously. Stopping, he struck a match, and a brilliant light appeared. It was a vapor lamp fixed on a shelf of rock. Presently he lit another, and then a third and a fourth, and in the white unwinking light every object in the cave stood out with startling distinctness. Michael saw the scarlet thing that stood in the cave's center, and, hardened as he was and prepared for that fearsome sight, he shuddered.

It was a guillotine!

## CHAPTER XL

### THE WIDOW

A GUILLOTINE! Standing in the middle of the cave, its high framework lifted starkly. It was painted red, and its very simplicity had a horror of its own.

Michael looked, fascinated. The basket, the bright, triangular knife suspended at the top of the frame, the tilted platform with its dangling straps, the black-painted lunette, shaped to receive the head of the victim and hold it in position till the knife fell in its oiled groove. He knew the machine bolt by bolt, had seen it in operation on gray mornings before French prisons, with soldiers holding back the crowd, and a little group of officials in the center of a cleared space. He knew the sound of it, the "*clop*" as it fell, sweeping to eternity the man beneath.

"The Widow," murmured the old man humorously. He touched the frame lovingly.

"Oh, I'm not fit to die!"

It was Penne's agonized wail that went echoing through the hollow spaces of the cavern.

"The Widow," murmured the old man again.

He was without a hat; his bald head shone in the light, yet there was nothing ludicrous in his appearance. His attitude toward this thing he loved was in a sense pathetic.

"Who shall be her first bridegroom?"

"Not me, not me!" declared Penne, wriggling back against the wall, his face ashen, his mouth working convulsively. "I'm not fit to die."

Longvale walked slowly over to him, stooped and raised him to his feet.

"Courage!" he murmured. "It is the hour!"

Jack Knebworth was pacing the road when the police car came flying back from Chichester.

"He's not there; hasn't been to the station at all," said the driver breathlessly, as he flung out of the car.

"He may have gone into Longvale's house."

"I've seen Mr. Longvale; it was he who told me that the captain had gone into Chichester. He must have made a mistake."

Knebworth's jaw dropped. A great light suddenly flashed upon his mind. Longvale! There

was something queer about him. Was it possible—

He remembered now that he had been puzzled by a contradictory statement the old man had made; remembered that not once, but many times had Sampson Longvale expressed a desire to be filmed in a favorite part of his own, one that he had presented, an episode in the life of his famous ancestor.

"We'll go and wake him up. I'll talk to him."

They hammered at the door without eliciting a response.

"That's his bedroom." Jack Knebworth pointed to a latticed window, where a light shone, and Inspector Lyle threw up a pebble with such violence that the glass was broken. Still there was no response.

"I don't like that," said Knebworth suddenly.

"You don't like it any better than I do," growled the officer. "Try that window, Smith."

"Do you want me to open it, sir?"

"Yes, without delay."

A second later the window of the long dining room was forced open; and then they came upon an obstacle which could not be so readily forced.

"The shutter is steel-lined," reported the detective. "I think I'd better try one of the

upper rooms. Give me a leg up, somebody."

With the assistance of a fellow, he reached up and caught the sill of an open window, the very window from which Adele had looked down into the grinning face of Bhag. In another second he was in the room and was reaching down to help up a second officer. A few minutes' delay, and the front door was unbarred and opened.

"There's nobody in the house, so far as I can find out," said the officer.

"Put a light on," ordered the inspector shortly.

They found the little vapor lamp and lit it.

"What's that?" The detective officer pointed to the hook that still hung in the beam with the pulley beneath, and his eyes narrowed. "I can't understand that," he said slowly. "What was that for?"

Jack Knebworth uttered an exclamation.

"Here's Brixan's gun!" he said and picked it up from the floor.

One glance the inspector gave, and then his eyes went back to the hook and the pulley.

"That beats me," he said. "See if you fellows can find anything anywhere. Open every cupboard, every drawer. Sound the walls—there may be secret doors; there are in all these old Tudor houses."

The search was futile, and Inspector Lyle came back to a worried contemplation of the hook and pulley. Then one of his men came in to say that he had located the garage.

It was an unusually long building, and when it was opened it revealed no more than the old-fashioned car which was a familiar object in that part of the country. But obviously this was only half the accommodation. The seemingly solid whitewashed wall behind the machine hid another apartment, though it had no door, and an inspection of the outside showed a solid wall at the far end of the garage. So far in the examination, so good.

Jack Knebworth tapped the interior wall. "This isn't brickwork at all—it's wood," he said.

Hanging in a corner was a chain. Apparently it had no particular function, but a careful scrutiny led to the discovery that the links ran through a hole in the roughly plastered ceiling. The inspector caught the chain and pulled, and, as he did so, the "wall" opened inward, showing the contents of the second chamber. Here was a second car, so sheeted that only its radiator was visible. Knebworth pulled off the cover.

"That's the car."

"What car?" asked the inspector.



"The car driven by The Head-hunter," said Knebworth quickly. "He was in that machine when Brixan tried to arrest him. I'd know it anywhere! Brixan is in the Dower House somewhere, and if he's in the hands of The Head-hunter, Heaven help him! He is pitiless!"

They ran back to the house, and again the hook and pulley drew them as a magnet. Suddenly the police officer bent down and jerked back the carpet. The trapdoor beneath the pulley was plainly visible. Pulling it open, he knelt down and gazed through. Knebworth saw his face grow haggard.

"Too late, too late!" he muttered.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE DEATH

THE shriek of a man half crazy with fear is not nice to hear. Michael's nerves were tough, but he had need to drive the nails into the palms of his manacled hands to keep his self-control.

"I warn you," he found voice to say, as the shrieking died to an unintelligible babble of sound, "Longvale, if you do this, you are everlastingly damned!"

The old man turned his quiet smile upon his second prisoner, but did not make any answer. Lifting the half-conscious man in his arms, as easily as though he were a child, he carried him to the terrible machine and laid him face downward on the tilted platform. There was no hurry. Michael saw in Longvale's leisure an enjoyment that was unbelievable. He stepped to the front of the machine and pulled up one half of the lunette; there was a click, and it remained stationary.

"An invention of mine," he said with pride, speaking over his shoulder.

Michael looked away for a second, past the grim executioner, to the farther end of the cave. And then he saw a sight that brought the blood to his cheeks. At first he thought he was dreaming, and that the strain of his ordeal was responsible for some grotesque vision.

Adele! She stood clear in the white light, so grimed with earth and dust that she seemed to be wearing a gray robe.

"If you move I will kill you!"

It was she! Michael twisted over on to his knees and staggered upright. Longvale heard the voice and turned slowly.

"My little lady," he said pleasantly. "How providential! I've always thought that the culminating point of my career would be, as was the sainted Charles Henri's, that moment when a queen came under his hand. How very singular!"

He walked slowly toward her, oblivious of the pointed pistol, of the danger in which he stood, a radiant smile on his face, his small, white hands extended, as to an honored guest.

"Shoot!" cried Michael hoarsely. "For Heaven's sake, shoot!"

She hesitated for a second and pressed the trigger. There was no sound. Clogged with

earth, the delicate mechanism did not act. She turned to flee, but Longvale's arm was round her, and his disengaged hand drew her head to his breast.

"You shall see, my dear," he said. "The Widow shall become the Widower, and you shall be his first bride!"

She was limp in his arms now, incapable of resistance. A strange sense of inertia overcame her; and, though she was conscious, she could neither move nor speak. Michael, struggling madly to release his hands, prayed that she might faint—that, whatever happened, she should be spared a consciousness of the terror.

"Now who shall be first?" murmured the old man, stroking his shiny head. "It would be fitting that my lady should show the way and be spared the agony of mind. And yet—" He looked thoughtfully at the prostrate figure strapped to the board and, tilting the platform, dropped the lunette about the head of Gregory Penne. The hand went up to the lever that controlled the knife. He paused again, evidently puzzling something out in his crazy mind.

"No, you shall be first," he said, as he unbuckled the strap and pushed the half-demented man to the ground.

Michael saw him lift his head, listening. There were hollow sounds above, as of people walking. Again he changed his mind, stooped and dragged Gregory Penne to his feet. Michael wondered why he held him so long, standing so rigidly; wondered why he dropped him suddenly to the ground; and then he wondered no longer. Something was crossing the floor of the cave—a great, hairy something, whose malignant eyes were turned upon the old man.

It was Bhag! His hair was matted with blood; his face wore the powder mask which Michael had seen when he emerged from Griff Towers. He stopped and sniffed at the groaning man on the floor, and his big paw touched the face tenderly. Then, without preliminary, he leaped at Longvale, and the old man went down with a crash to the ground, his arms whirling in futile defense. For a second Bhag stood over him, looking down, twittering and chattering; and then he raised the man and laid him in the place where his master had been, tilting the board and pushing it forward.

Michael gazed with fascinated horror. The great ape had witnessed an execution! It was from this cave that he had escaped the night that Foss was killed. His half human mind was re-

membering the details. Michael could almost see his mind working to recall the procedure.

Bhag fumbled with the frame, touched the spring that released the lunette, and it fell over the neck of The Head-hunter. And at that moment, attracted by a sound, Michael looked up and saw the trap above pulled back. Bhag heard it also, but was too intent upon his business to be interrupted. Longvale had recovered consciousness and was fighting to draw his head from the lunette. Presently he spoke. It was as though he realized the imminence of his fate and was struggling to find an appropriate phrase, for he lay quiescent now, his hands gripping the edge of the narrow platform on which he lay.

"Son of St. Louis, ascend to heaven!" he said, and at that moment Bhag jerked the handle that controlled the knife.

Inspector Lyle from above saw the blade fall, heard the indescribable sound of the thud that followed, and almost swooned. Then, from below:

"It's all right, inspector. You may find a rope in the buffet. Get down as quickly as you can and bring a gun."

The buffet cupboard contained another rope.

and a minute later the detective was going down, hand over hand.

"There's no danger from the monkey," said Michael.

Bhag was crooning over his senseless master, as a mother over her child.

"Get Miss Leamington away," said Michael in a low voice, as the detective began to unlock the handcuffs.

The girl lay, an inanimate and silent figure, by the side of the guillotine, happily oblivious to the tragedy which had been enacted in her presence. Another detective had descended the rope, and old Jack Knebworth, despite his years, was the third to enter the cave. It was he who found the door and aided the detective to carry the girl to safety, after her awful experience.

Unlocking the handcuffs from the baronet's wrists, Michael turned him over on his back. One glance at the face told the detective that the man was in a fit, and that his case, if not hopeless, was at least desperate. As though understanding that the man had no ill intent toward his master, Bhag watched passively, and then Michael remembered how, the first time he had seen the great ape, Bhag had smelled his hands with careful thoroughness.

"He's filing you for future reference, as a friend," had said Gregory at the time.

"Pick him up," said Michael, speaking distinctly in the manner that Gregory had addressed the ape.

Without hesitation Bhag stooped and lifted the limp man in his arms, and Michael guided him to the stairway and led him up the stairs.

The house was full of police, who gaped at the sight of the great ape and his burden.

"Take him upstairs and put him on the bed," ordered Michael.

Knebworth had already taken the girl off in his car to Chichester, for she had shown signs of reviving, and he wanted to get her away from that house before she fully recovered.

Michael went down into the cave again and joined the inspector. Together they made a brief tour. The headless figures in the niches told their own story. Farther on, Michael came to the bigger cavern with its floor littered with bones.

"Here is confirmation of the old legend," he said in a hushed voice and pointed. "These are the bones of those warriors and squires who were trapped in the cave by a landslide. You can see the horses' skeletons quite plainly."



How had Adele got into the cave? He was not long before he found the slide down which she had tumbled.

"Another mystery is explained," he said. "Griff tower was obviously built by the Romans to prevent cattle and men from falling through into the cave. Incidentally it has served as an excellent ventilator, and I have no doubt the old man had this way prepared, both as a hiding place for the people he had killed and as a way of escape."

He saw a candle lantern and matches that the girl had missed, and this he regarded as conclusive proof that his view was right.

They came back to the guillotine with its ghastly burden, and Michael stood in silence for a long time, looking at the still figure stretched on the platform, its hands still clutching the sides.

"How did he persuade these people to come to their death?" asked the inspector in a voice little above a whisper.

"That is a question for the psychologist," said Michael at last. "There is no doubt that he got in touch with many men who were contemplating suicide, but shrank from the act, and he performed this service for them. I should

imagine his practice of leaving around their heads for identification arose out of some poor wretch's desire that his wife and family should secure his insurance.

"He worked with extraordinary cunning. The letters, as you know, went to a house of call, and they were collected by an old man, who posted them to a second address, whence they were put in prepared envelopes and posted ostensibly to London. I discovered that the envelopes were kept in a specially lightproof box, and that the unknown advertiser had stipulated that they should not be taken out of that box until they were ready for posting. An hour after those letters were put in the mail, the address faded and became invisible, and another appeared.

"Vanishing ink?"

Michael nodded. "It is a trick that criminals frequently employ. The new address, of course, was Dower House. Put out the lights and let us go up."

Three lamps were extinguished, and the detective looked round fearfully at the shadows.

"I think we'll leave this down here," he said.

"I think we will," said Michael in complete agreement.

## CHAPTER XLII

### CAMERA

THREE months had passed since Dower House had yielded up its grisly secrets. A long enough time for Gregory Penne to recover completely and to have served one of the six months' imprisonment to which he was sentenced on a technical charge. The guillotine had been reërected in a certain "Black Museum" on the Thames Embankment, where young policemen come to look upon the equipment of criminality. People had ceased to talk about The Head-hunter.

It seemed a million years ago to Michael, as he sat perched on a table, watching Jack Knebworth, in the last stages of despair, directing a ruffled Reggie Connolly in the business of love-making. Near by stood Adele Leamington, a star by virtue of the success that had attended a certain picture.

Out of range of the camera, a cigarette between her fingers, Stella Mendoza, gorgeously attired, watched her some-time friend and

prospective leading man with good-natured contempt.

"There's nobody can tell me, Mr. Knebworth," said Reggie testily, "how to hold a girl! Good gracious, have I been asleep all my life? Don't you think I know as much about girls as you, Mr. Knebworth?"

"I don't care a darn how you hold your girl," howled Jack. "I'm telling you how to hold *my* girl! There's only one way of making love, and that's *my* way. I've got the patent rights! Your arm round her waist again, Connolly. Hold your head up, will you? Now turn this way. Now drop your chin a little. Smile, darn you, smile! Not a prop smile!" he shrieked. "Smile as if you liked her. Try to imagine that she loves you! I'll apologize to you, afterward, Adele, but try to imagine it, Connolly. That's better. You look as if you'd swallowed a liqueur of broken glass! Look down into her eyes—look, I said, not glare! That's better. Now do that again."

He watched, writhing, gesticulating, and at last, in cold resignation, he exclaimed:

"Rotten, but it'll have to do. Lights!"

The big Kreisler lights flared, the banked mercury lamps burned bluely, and the flood

lamps became blank expanses of diffused light. Again the rehearsal went through, and then:

"Camera!" wailed Jack, and the handle began to turn.

"That's all for you today, Connolly," said Jack. "Now, Miss Mendoza."

Adele came across to where Michael was sitting and jumped up on to the table beside him.

"Mr. Knebworth is quite right," she said, shaking her head. "Reggie Connolly doesn't know how to make love."

"Who does?" demanded Michael. "Except the right man?"

"He's supposed to be the right man," she insisted. "And, what's more, he's supposed to be the best lover on the English screen."

"Ha ha!" said Michael sardonically.

She was silent for a time, and then: "Why are you still here? I thought your work was finished in this part of the world."

"Not at all," he said cheerfully. "I've still an arrest to make."

She looked up at him quickly. "Another?" she said. "Who is it this time? I thought, when you took poor Sir Gregory—"

"Poor Sir Gregory!" he scoffed. "He ought to be a very happy man. Six months' hard

labor was just what he wanted, and he was lucky to be charged, not with the killing of his unfortunate servant, but with the concealment of his death."

"Whom are you arresting now?"

"I'm not so sure," said Michael, "whether I shall arrest her."

"Is it a woman?"

He nodded.

"What has she done?"

"The charge isn't definitely settled," he said evasively, "but I think there will be several counts. Creating a disturbance will be one; deliberately endangering public health—at any rate, the health of one of the public—will be another; maliciously wounding the feelings—"

"Oh, *you*, you mean?"

She laughed softly. "I thought that was part of your delirium that night at the hospital, or part of mine. But, as other people saw you kiss me, it must have been yours. I don't think I want to marry," she said thoughtfully. "I am—"

"Don't say that you are wedded to your art," he groaned. "They all say that!"

"No, I'm not wedded to anything except a desire to prevent my best friend from making a great mistake. You've a very big career in front

of you, Michael, and marrying me is not going to help you. People will think you're just infatuated, and when the inevitable divorce comes along—"

They both laughed together.

"If you have finished being like a maiden aunt, I want to tell you something," said Michael. "I've loved you from the moment I saw you."

"Of course you have," she said calmly. "That's the only possible way you *can* love a girl. If it takes three days to make up your mind it can't be love. That's why I know I don't love you. I was annoyed with you the first time I met you; I was furious with you the second time; and I've just tolerated you ever since. Wait till I get my makeup off."

She got down and ran to her dressing room. Michael strolled across to comfort an exhausted Jack Knebworth.

"Adele? Oh, she's all right. She really has had an offer from America—not Hollywood, but a studio in the East. I've advised her not to take it until she's a little more proficient, but I don't think she wanted any advice. That girl isn't going to stay in the picture business."

"What makes you think that, Knebworth?"

"She's going to get married," said Jack glumly. "I can recognize the signs. I told you all along that there was something queer about her. She's going to get married and leave the screen for good—that's her eccentricity."

"And whom do you think she will marry?" asked Michael.

Old Jack snorted. "It won't be Reggie Connolly—that I can promise you."

"I should jolly well say not!" said that indignant young man, who had remarkably keen ears. "I'm not a marrying chap. It spoils an artist. A wife is like a millstone round his neck. He has no chance of expressing his individuality. And, while we are on that subject, Mr. Knebworth, are you perfectly sure that I'm to blame? Doesn't it strike you—mind you, I wouldn't say a word against the dear girl—doesn't it strike you that Miss Leamington isn't quite—what shall I say?—seasoned in love—that's the expression. She seems to be an amateur."

Stella Mendoza had strolled up. She had returned to the scene of her former labors, and it looked very much as if she were coming back to her former position.

"When you say 'seasoned' you mean 'smoked,' Reggie," she said. "I think you're wrong."



"I can't be wrong," said Reggie complacently. "I've made love to more girls in this country than any other five leading men, and I tell you that Miss Leamington is distinctly and fearfully immature."

The object of their discussion appeared at the end of the studio, nodded a cheery good night to the company, and went out, Michael at her heels.

"You're fearfully immature," he said, as he guided her across the road.

"Who said so? It sounds like Reggie; that is a favorite word of his."

"He says you know nothing whatever about love-making."

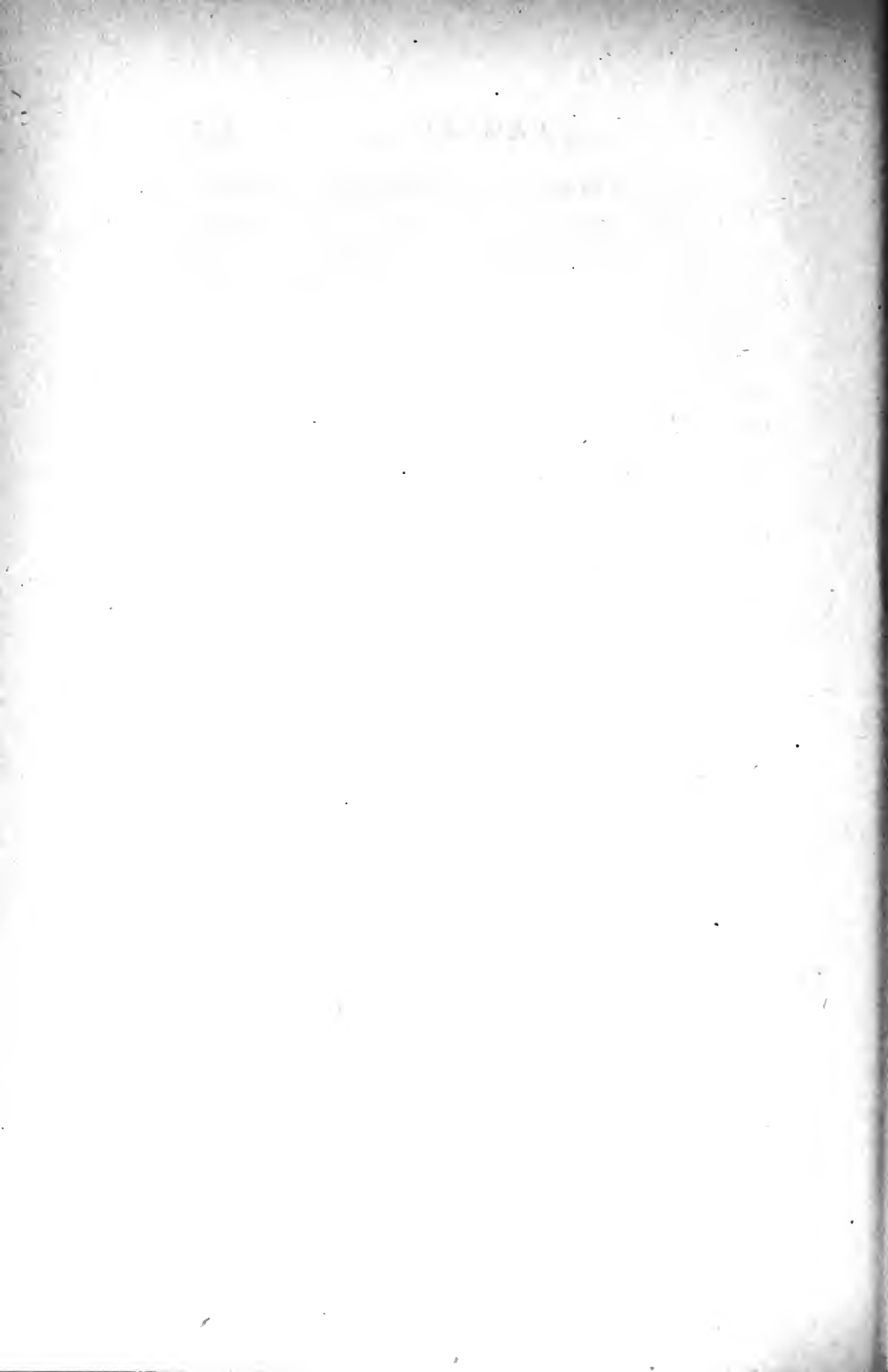
"Perhaps I don't," she said shortly, and so baffling was her tone that he was not prepared to continue the subject, until they reached the long, dark road in which she lived.

"The proper way to make love," he said, more than a little appalled at his own boldness, "is to put one hand on the waist——"

Suddenly she was in his arms, her cool face against his.

"There isn't any way," she murmured. "One just does!"

THE END



**BLUE HAND**



# BLUE HAND

## CHAPTER ONE

**M**R. SEPTIMUS SALTER pressed the bell on his table for the third time and uttered a soft growl.

He was a stout, elderly man, and with his big red face and white side-whiskers, looked more like a prosperous farmer than a successful lawyer. The cut of his clothes was queerly out of date, the high white collar and the black satin cravat that bulged above a flowered waistcoat, were of the fashion of 1850, in which year Mr. Salter was a little ahead of his time, so far as fashions were concerned. But the years had caught him up and passed him, and although there was not a more up-to-date solicitor in London, he remained faithful to the style in which he had made a reputation as a "buck."

He pressed the bell again, this time impatiently.

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered, and rising to his feet, he stalked into the little room where his secretary was usually to be found.

He had expected to find the apartment empty, but it was not. A chair had been drawn sideways up to the big ink-stained table, and kneeling on this, his elbows on the table, his face between his hands, was a young man who was absorbed in the perusal of a document, one of the many which littered the table.

"Steele!" said Mr. Salter sharply, and the reader looked up with a start and sprang to his feet.

He was taller than the average and broad of shoulder, though he gave an impression of liteness. His tanned face spoke eloquently of days spent out of doors, the straight nose, the firm mouth, and the strong chin were all part of the characteristic "soldier face" molded by four years of war into a semblance of hardness.

Now he was a little confused, more like the guilty schoolboy than the V.C. who had tackled eight enemy aëroplanes, and had come back to his aërodrome with a dozen bullets in his body.

"Really, Steele," said Mr. Salter reproachfully, "you are too bad. I have rung the bell three times for you."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Jim Steele, and that disarming smile of his went straight to the old man's heart.

"What are you doing here?" growled Mr. Salter, looking at the papers on the desk, and then with a "tut" of impatience, "aren't you tired of going over the Danton case?"

"No, sir, I'm not," said Steele quietly. "I have a feeling that Lady Mary Danton can be found, and I think if she is found there will be a very satisfactory explanation for her disappearance, and one which will rather disconcert——" he stopped, fearful of committing an indiscretion.

Mr. Salter looked at him keenly and helped himself to a pinch of snuff.

"You don't like Mr. Groat?" he asked and Jim laughed.

"Well, sir, it's not for me to like him or dislike him," he replied. "Personally, I've no use for that kind of person. The only excuse a man of thirty can produce

for not having been in the war, is that he was dead at the time."

"He had a weak heart," suggested Mr. Salter, but without any great conviction.

"I think he had," said Jim with a little twist of his lips. "We used to call it a 'poor heart' in the army. It made men go sick on the eve of a battle, and drove them into dug-outs when they should have been advancing across the open with their comrades."

Mr. Salter looked down at the papers.

"Put them away, Steele," he said quietly. "You're not going to get any satisfaction out of the search for a woman who—why, she must have disappeared when you were a child of five."

"I wish, sir——" began Steele, and hesitated, "of course, it's really no business of mine," he smiled, "and I've no right to ask you, but I'd like to hear more details of that disappearance if you can spare me the time—and if you feel inclined. I've never had the courage to question you before. What is the real story of her disappearance?"

Mr. Salter frowned, and then the frown was gradually replaced by a smile.

"I think, Steele, you're the worst secretary I ever had," he said in despair. "And if I weren't your godfather and morally bound to help you, I should write you a polite little note saying your services were not required after the end of this week."

Jim Steele laughed.

"I have expected that ever since I've been here," he said.

There was a twinkle in the old lawyer's eyes. He was secretly fond of Jim Steele; fonder than the boy

could have imagined. But it was not only friendship and a sense of duty that held Jim down in his job. The young man was useful, and despite his seeming inability to hear bells when he was wrapped up in his favorite study, most reliable.

"Shut that door," he said gruffly, and when the other had obeyed, "I'm telling this story to you," and he pointed a warning finger at Jim Steele, "not because I want to satisfy your curiosity, but because I hope that I'm going to kill all interest in the Danton mystery, as you call it, for ever more! Lady Mary Danton was the only daughter of the Earl of Plimstock—a title which is now extinct. She married, when she was quite a young girl, Jonathan Danton, a millionaire shipowner, and the marriage was not a success. Jonathan was a hard, sour man, and a sick man, too. You talk about Digby Groat having a bad heart, well, Jonathan had a real bad one. I think his ill-health was partly responsible for his harsh treatment of his wife. At any rate, the baby that was born to them, a girl, did not seem to bring them together—in fact, they grew farther apart. Danton had to go to America on business. Before he left, he came to this office and sitting at that very table, he signed a will, one of the most extraordinary wills that I have ever had engrossed. He left the whole of his fortune to his daughter Dorothy, who was then three or four months old. In the event of her death, he provided that the money should go to his sister, Mrs. Groat, but not until twenty years after the date of the child's death. In the meantime Mrs. Groat was entitled to enjoy the income from the estate."

"Why did he do that?" asked Jim, puzzled.



"I think that is easily understood," said Mr. Salter. "He was providing against the child's death in its infancy, and he foresaw that the will might be contested by Lady Mary. As it was drawn up—I haven't explained all the details—it could not be so contested for twenty years. However, it was not contested," he said quietly. "Whilst Danton was in America, Lady Mary disappeared and with her the baby. Nobody knew where she went to, but the baby and a strange nurse, who for some reason or other had care of the child, were traced to Margate. Possibly Lady Mary was there, too, though we have no evidence of this. We do know that the nurse, who was the daughter of a fisherman and could handle a boat, took the child out on the sea one summer day and was overtaken by a fog. All the evidence shows that the little boat was run down by a liner, and its battered wreck was picked up at sea, and a week later the body of the nurse was recovered. We never knew what became of Lady Mary. Danton returned a day or two after the tragedy, and the news was broken to him by Mrs. Groat, his sister. It killed him."

"And Lady Mary was never seen again?"

Salter shook his head.

"So you see, my boy," he rose, and dropped his hand on the other's shoulder, "even if by a miracle you could find Lady Mary, you could not in any way affect the position of Mrs. Groat, or her son. There is only one tiny actress in this drama who could ever have benefited by Jonathan Danton's will, and she," he lowered his voice until it was little more than a whisper, "she is beyond recall—beyond recall!"

There was a moment of silence.

"I realize that, sir," said Jim Steele quietly, "only——"

"Only what?"

"I have a queer feeling that there is something wrong about the whole business, and I believe that if I gave my time to the task I could unveil this mystery."

Mr. Salter looked at his secretary sharply, but Jim Steele met his eyes without faltering.

"You ought to be a detective," he said ironically.

"I wish to heaven I was," was the unexpected reply. "I offered my services to Scotland Yard two years ago when the Thirteen Gangs were holding up the banks with impunity."

"Oh, you did, did you?" said the lawyer sarcastically as he opened the door, and then suddenly he turned. "Why did I ring for you?" he asked. "Oh, I remember! I want you to get out all those Danton leases of the Cumberland property."

"Is Mrs. Groat selling?" asked Steele.

"She can't sell, yet," said the lawyer, "but on the thirtieth of May, providing a caveat is not entered, she takes control of the Danton millions."

"Or her son does," said Jim significantly. He had followed his employer back to the big private office with its tiers of deed boxes, its worn furniture and threadbare carpet and general air of mustiness.

"A detective, eh?" snorted Mr. Salter as he sat down at his table. "And what is your equipment for your new profession?"

Jim smiled, but there was an unusual look in his face.

"Faith," he said quietly.

"Faith? What is faith to a detective?" asked the startled Salter.

"'Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things unseen,'" Jim quoted the passage almost solemnly and for a long time Mr. Salter did not speak. Then he took up a slip of paper on which he had scribbled some notes, and passed it across to Jim.

"See if you can 'detect' these deeds, they are in the strong-room," he said, but in spite of his jesting words he was impressed.

Jim took up the slip, examined it, and was about to speak when there came a tap at the door and a clerk slipped into the room.

"Will you see Mr. Digby Groat, sir?" he asked.

## CHAPTER TWO

**M**R. SALTER glanced up with a humorous glint in his eye.

"Yes," he said with a nod, and then to Jim as he was about to make a hurried exit, "you can wait, Steele. Mr. Groat wrote in his letter that he wanted to see the deeds, and you may have to conduct him to the strong-room."

Jim Steele said nothing.

Presently the clerk opened the door and a young man walked in.

Jim had seen him before and had liked him less every time he had met him. The oblong sallow face, with its short black mustache, the sleepy eyes, and rather large chin and prominent ears, he could have painted, if he were an artist, with his eyes shut. And yet Digby Groat was good-looking. Even Jim could not deny that. He was a credit to his valet. From the top of his pomaded head to his patent shoes he was an exquisite. His morning coat was of the most fashionable cut and fitted him perfectly. One could have used the silk hat he carried in his hand as a mirror, and as he came into the room exuding a delicate aroma of *Quelques Fleurs*, Jim's nose curled. He hated men who scented themselves, however daintily the process was carried out.

Digby Groat looked from the lawyer to Steele with that languid, almost insolent look in his dark eyes, which the lawyer hated as much as his secretary.

"Good morning, Salter," he said.

He took a silk handkerchief from his pocket and, dusting a chair, sat down uninvited, resting his lemon-gloved hands upon a gold-headed ebony cane.

"You know Mr. Steele, my secretary," said Salter.

The other nodded his glossy head.

"Oh, yes, he's a Victoria Cross person, isn't he?" he asked wearily. "I suppose you find it very dull here, Steele? A place like this would bore me to death."

"I suppose it would," said Jim, "but if you'd had four years' excitement of war, you would welcome this place as a calm haven of rest."

"I suppose so," said the other shortly. He was not too well pleased by Jim's reference to the fact that he had escaped the trials of war.

"Now, Dr. Groat——" but the other stopped him with a gesture.

"Please don't call me 'doctor,'" he said with a pained expression. "The fact that I have been through the medical schools and have gained my degrees in surgery, is one which I wish you would forget. I qualified for my own amusement, and if people get into the habit of thinking of me as a 'doctor,' I shall be called up all hours of the night by all sorts of wretched patients."

It was news to Jim that this sallow dandy had graduated in medicines.

"I came to see those Lakeside leases, Salter," Groat went on. "I have had an offer—I should say, my mother has had an offer—from a syndicate which is erecting an hotel upon her property. I understand there is some clause in the lease which prevents build-

ing operations of that character. If so, it was beastly thoughtless of old Danton to acquire such a property."

"Mr. Danton did nothing either thoughtless or beastly thoughtless," said Salter quietly, "and if you had mentioned it in your letter, I could have telephoned you the information and saved your calling. As it is, Steele will take you to the strong-room and you can examine the leases at your leisure."

Groat looked at Jim sceptically.

"Does he know anything about leases?" he asked. "And must I really descend into your infernal cellar and catch my death of cold? Can't the leases be brought up for me?"

"If you will go into Mr. Steele's room I daresay he will bring them to you," said Salter, who did not like his client any more than Jim did. Moreover, he had a shrewd suspicion that the moment the Groats gained possession of the Danton fortune, they would find another lawyer to look after their affairs.

Jim took the keys and returned with an armful of deeds, to discover that Groat was no longer with his chief.

"I sent him into your room," said Salter. "Take the leases in and explain them to him. If there's anything you want to know I'll come in."

Jim found the young man in his room. He was examining a book he had taken from a shelf.

"What does 'dactylology' mean?" he asked, looking round as Jim came in. "I see you have a book on the subject."

"Finger prints," said Jim Steele briefly. He hated the calm proprietorial attitude of the man and, moreover, Mr. Groat was examining his own private library.

"Finger prints, eh?" said Groat, replacing the book. "Are you interested in finger-prints?"

"A little," said Jim. "Here are the Lakeside leases, Mr. Groat. I made a sketchy examination of them in the strong-room and there seems to be no clause preventing the erection of the building you mention."

Groat took the document in his hand and turned it leaf by leaf.

"No," he said at last, and then putting down the document, "so you're interested in finger prints, eh? I didn't know old Salter did a criminal business."

"He has very little common law practice," said Jim.

"What are these?" asked Groat.

By the side of Jim's desk was a book-shelf filled with thick black exercise books.

"Those are my private notes," said Jim and the other looked round with a sneering smile.

"What the devil have you got to make notes about, I wonder?" he asked, and before Jim could stop him, he had taken one of the exercise books down.

"If you don't mind," said Jim firmly, "I would rather you left my private property alone."

"Sorry, but I thought everything in old Salter's office had to do with his clients."

"You're not the only client," said Jim. He was not one to lose his temper, but this insolent man was trying his patience sorely.

"What is it all about?" asked the languid Groat, as he turned one page.

Jim, standing at the other side of the table watching him, saw a touch of color come into the man's yellow

face. The black eyes hardened and his languid interest dropped away like a cloak.

"What is this?" he asked sharply. "What the hell are you——"

He checked himself with a great effort and laughed, but the laugh was harsh and artificial.

"You're a wonderful fellow, Steele," he said with a return to his old air of insouciance. "Fancy bothering your head about things of that sort."

He put the book back where he had found it, picked up another of the leases and appeared to be reading it intently, but Jim, watching him, saw that he was not reading, even though he turned page after page.

"That is all right," he said at last, putting the lease down and taking up his top hat. "Some day perhaps you will come and dine with us, Steele. I've had rather a stunning laboratory built at the back of our house in Grosvenor Square. Old Salter called me doctor!" he chuckled quietly as though at a big joke, "well, if you come along, I will show you something that will at least justify the title."

The dark brown eyes were fixed steadily upon Jim as he stood in the doorway, one yellow-gloved hand on the handle.

"And, by-the-way, Mr. Steele," he drawled, "your studies are leading you into a danger zone for which even a second Victoria Cross could not adequately compensate you."

He closed the door carefully behind him and Jim Steele frowned after him.

"What the dickens does he mean?" he asked, and



then remembered the exercise book through which Groat had glanced, and which had had so strange an effect upon him. He took the book down from the shelf and turning to the first page, read: "Some notes upon the Thirteen Gang."

### CHAPTER THREE

**T**HAT afternoon Jim Steele went into Mr. Salter's office.

"I'm going to tea now, sir," he said.

Mr. Salter glanced up at the solemn-faced clock that ticked audibly on the opposite wall.

"All right," he grumbled, "but you're a very punctual tea-drinker, Steele. What are you blushing about—is it a girl?"

"No, sir," said Jim rather loudly. "I sometimes meet a lady at tea, but——"

"Off you go," said the old man gruffly. "And give her my love."

Jim was grinning, but he was very red, too, when he went down the stairs into Marlborough Street. He hurried his pace because he was a little late, and breathed a sigh of relief as he turned into the quiet tea-shop to find that his table was as yet unoccupied.

As his tall, athletic figure strode through the room to the little recess overlooking Regent Street, which was reserved for privileged customers, many heads were turned, for Jim Steele was a splendid figure of British manhood, and the gray laughing eyes had played havoc in many a tender heart.

But he was one of those men whose very idealism forbade trifling. He had gone straight from a public school into the tragic theater of conflict, and at an

age when most young men were dancing attendance upon women, his soul was being seared by the red-hot irons of war.

He sat down at the table and the beaming waitress came forward to attend to his needs.

"Your young lady hasn't come yet, sir," she said.

It was the first time she had made such a reference to Eunice Weldon and Jim stiffened.

"The young lady who has tea with me is not my 'young lady,' " he said a little coldly, and seeing that he had hurt the girl, he added with a gleam of mirth in those irresistible eyes, "she's your young lady really."

"I'm sorry," said the waitress, scribbling on her order pad to hide her confusion. "I suppose you'll have the usual?"

"I'll have the usual," said Jim gravely, and then with a quick glance at the door he rose to meet the girl who had at that moment entered.

She was slim of build, straight as a plummet line from chin to toe; she carried herself with a dignity which was so natural that the men who haunt the pavement to leer and importune, stood on one side to let her pass, and then, after a glimpse of her face, cursed their own timidity. For it was a face Madonna-like in its purity. But a blue-eyed, cherry-lipped Madonna, vital and challenging. A bud of a girl breaking into the summer bloom of existence. In those sapphire eyes the beacon fires of life signaled her womanhood; they were at once a plea and a warning. Yet she carried the banners of childhood no less triumphantly. The sensitive mouth, the round, girlish chin, the satin white throat and clean, transparent skin, unmarked, unblemished, these were the gifts of youth

which were carried forward to the account of her charm.

Her eyes met Jim's and she came forward with outstretched hand.

"I'm late," she said gaily. "We had a tiresome duchess at the studio who wanted to be taken in seventeen different poses—it is always the plain people who give the most trouble."

She sat down and stripped her gloves, with a smile at the waitress.

"The only chance that plain people have of looking beautiful is to be photographed beautifully," said Jim.

Eunice Weldon was working at a fashionable photographer's in Regent Street. Jim's meeting with her had been in the very room in which they were now sitting. The hangings at the window had accidentally caught fire, and Jim, in extinguishing them, had burnt his hand. It was Eunice Weldon who had dressed the injury.

A service rendered by a man to a woman may not lead very much farther to a better acquaintance. When a woman helps a man it is invariably the beginning of a friendship. Women are suspicious of the services which men give and yet feel responsible for the man they have helped, even to the slightest extent.

Since then they had met almost daily and taken tea together. Once Jim had asked her to go to a theater, an invitation which she had promptly but kindly declined. Thereafter he had made no further attempt to improve their acquaintance.

"And how have you got on with your search for the missing lady?" she asked, as she spread some jam on

the thin bread-and-butter which the waitress had brought.

Jim's nose wrinkled—a characteristic grimace of his.

"Mr. Salter made it clear to me to-day that even if I found the missing lady it wouldn't greatly improve matters," he said.

"It would be wonderful if the child had been saved after all," she said. "Have you ever thought of that possibility?"

He nodded.

"There is no hope of that," he said shaking his head, "but it would be wonderful, as you say, and more wonderful," he laughed, "if you were the missing heiress!"

"And there's no hope of that either," she said, shaking her head. "I'm the daughter of poor but honest parents, as the story-books say."

"Your father was a South African, wasn't he?"

She nodded.

"Poor daddy was a musician, and mother I can hardly remember, but she must have been a dear."

"Where were you born?" asked Jim.

She did not answer immediately because she was busy with her jam sandwich.

"In Cape Town—Rondebosch, to be exact," she said after a while. "Why are you so keen on finding your long-lost lady?"

"Because I am anxious that the most unmitigated cad in the world should not succeed to the Danton millions."

She sat bolt upright.

"The Danton millions?" she repeated slowly.

"Then who is your unmitigated cad? You have never yet mentioned the names of these people."

This was perfectly true. Jim Steele had not even spoken of his search until a few days before.

"A man named Digby Groat."

She stared at him aghast.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked in surprise.

"When you said 'Danton' I remembered Mr. Curley—that is our chief photographer—saying that Mrs. Groat was the sister of Jonathan Danton," she said slowly.

"Do you know the Groats?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know them," she said slowly, "at least, not very well, only——" she hesitated, "I'm going to be Mrs. Groat's secretary."

He stared at her.

"You never told me this," he said, and as she dropped her eyes to her plate, he realized that he had made a *faux pas*. "Of course," he said hurriedly "there's no reason why you should tell me, but——"

"It only happened to-day," she said. "Mr. Groat has had some photographs taken—his mother came with him to the studio. She's been several times and I scarcely noticed them until to-day, when Mr. Curley called me into the office and said that Mrs. Groat was in need of a secretary and that it was a very good position; £5 a week, which is practically all profit because I should live in the house."

"When did Mrs. Groat decide that she wanted a secretary?" asked Jim, and it was her turn to stare.

"I don't know, why do you ask that?"

"She was at our office a month ago," said Jim, "and Mr. Salter suggested that she should have a secretary

to keep her accounts in order. She said then she hated the idea of having anybody in the house who was neither a servant nor a friend of the family."

"Well, she's changed her views now," smiled the girl.

"This means that we shan't meet at tea any more. When are you going?"

"To-morrow," was the discouraging reply.

He went back to his office more than a little dispirited. Something deep and vital seemed to have gone out of his life.

"You're in love, you fool," he growled to himself.

He opened the big diary which it was his business to keep and slammed down the covers savagely.

Mr. Salter had gone home. He always went home early, and Jim lit his pipe and began to enter up the day's transactions from the scribbled notes which his chief had left on his desk.

He had made the last entry and was making a final search of the desk for some scrap which he might have overlooked.

Mr. Salter's desk was usually tidy, but he had a habit of concealing important memoranda, and Jim turned over the law books on the table in a search for any scribbled memo he might have missed. He found between two volumes a thin gilt-edged note-book, which he did not remember having seen before. He opened it to discover that it was a diary for the year 1901. Mr. Salter was in the habit of making notes for his own private reading, using a queer legal shorthand, which no clerk had ever been able to decipher. The entries in the diary were in these characters.

Jim turned the leaves curiously, wondering how so

methodical a man as the lawyer had left a private diary visible. He knew that in the big green safe in the lawyer's office were stacks of these books, and possibly the old man had taken one out to refresh his memory. The writing was Greek to Jim, so that he felt no compunction in turning the pages filled as they were with indecipherable and meaningless scrawls, punctuated now and again with a word in longhand.

He stopped suddenly, for under the heading "June 4th" was quite a long entry. It seemed to have been written in subsequently to the original shorthand entry, for it was in green ink. This almost dated the inscription. Eighteen months before, an oculist had suggested to Mr. Salter, who suffered from an unusual form of astigmatism, that green ink would be easier for him to read, and ever since then he had used no other.

Jim took in the paragraph before he realized that he was committing an unpardonable act in reading his employer's private notes.

"One month imprisonment with hard labor. Holloway Prison. Released July 2nd. Madge Benson (this word was underlined), 14, Palmer's Terrace, Paddington. 74, Highcliffe Gardens, Margate. Long enquiries with boatman who owned 'Saucy Belle.' No further trace——"

Here the entry ended.

"What on earth does that mean?" muttered Jim. "I must make a note of that."

He realized now that he was doing something which might be regarded as dishonorable, but he was so absorbed in the new clues that he overcame his repugnance.



Obviously, this entry referred to the missing Lady Mary. Who the woman Madge Benson was, what the reference to Holloway Gaol meant, he would discover.

He made a copy of the entry in the diary at the back of a card, went back to his room, locked the door of his desk and went home, to think out some plan of campaign.

He occupied a small flat in a building overlooking Regent's Park. It is true that his particular flat overlooked nothing but the backs of other houses, and a deep cutting through which were laid the lines of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway—he could have dropped a penny on the carriages as they passed, so near was the line. But the rent of the flat was only one-half of that charged for those in a more favorable position. And his flat was smaller than any. He had a tiny private income, amounting to two or three pounds a week, and that, with his salary, enabled him to maintain himself in something like comfort. The three rooms he occupied were filled with priceless old furniture that he had saved from the wreckage of his father's home, when that easy-going man had died, leaving just enough to settle his debts, which were many.

Jim had got out of the lift on the fourth floor and had put the key in the lock when he heard the door on the opposite side of the landing open, and turned round.

The elderly woman who came out wore the uniform of a nurse, and she nodded pleasantly.

"How is your patient, nurse?" asked Jim.

"She's very well, sir, or rather as well as you could expect a bedridden lady to be," said the woman with a

smile. "She's greatly obliged to you for the books you sent in to her."

"Poor soul," said Jim sympathetically. "It must be terrible not to be able to go out."

The nurse shook her head.

"I suppose it is," she said, "but Mrs. Fane doesn't seem to mind. You get used to it after seven years."

A "rat-tat" above made her lift her eyes.

"There's the post," she said. "I thought it had gone. I'd better wait till he comes down."

The postman at Featherdale Mansions was carried by the lift to the sixth floor and worked his way to the ground floor. Presently they heard his heavy feet coming down and he loomed in sight.

"Nothing for you, sir," he said to Jim, glancing at the bundle of letters in his hand.

"Miss Madge Benson—that's you, nurse, isn't it?"

"That's right," said the woman briskly and took the letter from his hand, then with a little nod to Jim she went downstairs.

Madge Benson! The name that had appeared in Salter's diary!

## CHAPTER FOUR

"I 'M sick to death of hearing your views on the subject, mother," said Mr. Digby Groat, as he helped himself to a glass of port. "It is sufficient for you that I want the girl to act as your secretary. Whether you give her any work to do or not is a matter of indifference to me. Whatever you do, you must not leave her with the impression that she is brought here for any other purpose than to write your letters and deal with your correspondence."

The woman who sat at the other side of the table looked older than she was. Jane Groat was over sixty, but there were people who thought she was twenty years more than that. Her yellow face was puckered and lined, her blue veined hands folded now on her lap, were gnarled and ugly. Only the dark brown eyes held their brightness undimmed. Her figure was bent and there was about her a curious cringing frightened look which was almost pitiable. She did not look at her son—she seldom looked at anybody.

"She'll spy, she'll pry," she moaned.

"Shut up about the girl!" he snarled, "and now we've got a minute to ourselves, I'd like to tell you something, mother."

Her uneasy eyes went left and right, but avoided him. There was a menace in his tone with which she was all too familiar.

"Look at this."

He had taken from his pocket something that sparkled and glittered in the light of the table lamp.

"What is it?" she whined without looking.

"It is a diamond bracelet," he said sternly. "And it is the property of Lady Waltham. We were staying with the Walthams for the week-end. Look at it!"

His voice was harsh and grating and dropping her head she began to weep painfully.

"I found that in your room," he said, and his suave manner was gone. "You old thief!" he hissed across the table, "can't you break yourself of that habit?"

"It looked so pretty," she gulped, her tears trickling down her withered face. "I can't resist the temptation when I see pretty things."

"I suppose you know that Lady Waltham's maid has been arrested for stealing this, and will probably go to prison for six months?"

"I couldn't resist the temptation," she sniveled, and he threw the bracelet on the table with a growl.

"I'm going to send it back to the woman and tell them it must have been packed away by mistake in your bag. I'm not doing it to get this girl out of trouble, but to save myself from a lot of unpleasantness."

"I know why you're bringing this girl into the house," she sobbed, "it is to spy on me."

His lips curled in a sneer.

"To spy on you!" he said contemptuously and laughed as he rose. "Now understand," his voice was harsh again, "you've got to break yourself of this habit of picking up things that you like. I'm expecting to go into Parliament at the next election, and I'm

not going to have my position jeopardized by an old fool of a kleptomaniac. If there's something wrong with your brain," he added significantly, "I've a neat little laboratory at the back of this house where that might be attended to."

She shrank back in terror, her face gray.

"You—you wouldn't do it—my own son!" she stammered. "I'm all right, Digby, it's only——"

He smiled, but it was not a pleasant smile to see.

"Probably there is a little compression," he said evenly, "some tiny malgrowth of bone that is pressing on a particular cell. We could put that right for you, mother——"

But she had thrown her chair aside and fled from the room before he had finished. He picked up the jewel, looked at it contemptuously and thrust it into his pocket. Her curious thieving propensities he had known for a very long time and had fought to check them, and as he thought, successfully.

He went to his library, a beautiful apartment, with its silver grate, its costly rosewood bookshelves and its rare furnishings, and wrote a letter to Lady Waltham. He wrapped this about the bracelet, and having packed letter and jewel carefully in a small box, rang the bell. A middle-aged man with a dark, forbidding face, answered the summons.

"Deliver this to Lady Waltham at once, Jackson," said Digby. "The old woman is going out to a concert to-night, by-the-way, and when she's out I want you to make a very thorough search of her room."

The man shook his head.

"I've already looked carefully, Mr. Groat," he said, "and I've found nothing."

He was on the point of going when Digby called him back.

"You've told the housekeeper to see to Miss Weldon's room?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "She wanted to put her on the top floor amongst the servants, but I stopped her."

"She must have the best room in the house," said Groat. "See that there are plenty of flowers in the room and put in the bookcase and the Chinese table that are in my room."

The man nodded.

"What about the key, sir?" he asked after some hesitation.

"The key?" Digby looked up. "The key of her room?"

The man nodded.

"Do you want the door to lock?" he asked significantly.

Mr. Groat's lips curled in a sneer.

"You're a fool," he said. "Of course, I want the door to lock. Put bolts on if necessary."

The man looked his surprise. There was evidently between these two something more than the ordinary relationship which existed between employer and servant.

"Have you ever run across a man named Steele?" asked Digby, changing the subject.

Jackson shook his head.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"He is a lawyer's clerk. Give him a look up when you've got some time to spare. No, you'd better

not go—ask—ask Bronson. He lives at Featherdale Mansions.”

The man nodded and Digby went down the steps to the waiting electric brougham.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eunice Weldon had packed her small wardrobe and the cab was waiting at the door. She had no regrets at leaving the stuffy untidy lodging which had been her home for two years and her farewell to her disheveled landlady, who seemed always to have dressed in a violent hurry, was soon over. She could not share Jim Steele's dislike of her new employers. She was too young to regard a new job as anything but the beginning of an adventure which held all sorts of fascinating possibilities. She sighed as she realized that the little tea-table talks which had been so pleasant a feature of her life were now to come to an end, and yet—surely he would make some effort to see her again?

She would have hours—perhaps half-days to herself, and then she remembered with dismay that she did not know his address! But he would know hers. That thought comforted her, for she wanted to see him again. She wanted to see him more than she had ever dreamt she would. She could close her eyes, and his handsome face, those true smiling eyes of his, would look into hers. The swing of his shoulders as he walked, the sound of his voice as he spoke—every characteristic of his was present in her mind.

And the thought that she might not see him again—

“I will see him—I will!” she murmured, as the cab stopped before the imposing portals of No. 409, Grosvenor Square.

She was a little bewildered by the army of servants who came to her help and just a little pleased by the deference they showed to her.

"Mrs. Groat will receive you, miss," said a swarthy-looking man, whose name she afterwards learnt was Jackson.

She was ushered into a small back drawing-room which seemed poorly furnished to the girl's eye, but to Mrs. Groat was luxury.

The old woman resented the payment of a penny that was spent on decoration and furniture and only the fear of her son prevented her from disputing every account which was put before her for settlement. The meeting was a disappointment to Eunice. She had not seen Mrs. Groat except in the studio where she was beautifully dressed. She saw now a yellow-faced old woman, shabbily attired, who looked at her with dark disapproving eyes.

"Oh, so you're the young woman who is going to be my secretary, are you?" she quavered dismally. "Have they shown you your room?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Groat," said the girl.

"I hope you will be comfortable," said Mrs. Groat in a voice that suggested that she had no very great hopes for anything of the sort.

"When do I begin my duties?" asked Eunice, conscious of a chill.

"Oh, any time," said the old woman off-handedly.

She peered up at the girl.

"You're pretty," she said grudgingly and Eunice flushed. Somehow that compliment sounded like an insult. "I suppose that's why," said Mrs. Groat absently.



"Why what?" asked the girl gently.

She thought the woman was weak of intellect and had already lost whatever enthusiasm she had for her new position.

"Nothing," said the old woman, and with a nod dismissed her.

The room into which Eunice was shown left her speechless for a while.

"Are you sure this is mine?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes, miss," said the housekeeper with a sidelong glance at the girl.

"But this is beautiful!" said Eunice.

The room would have been remarkable if it had been in a palace. The walls were paneled in brocade silk and the furniture was of the most beautiful quality. A small French bed, carved and gilded elaborately, invited repose. Silk hangings hung at either side of the head and through the French windows she saw a balcony gay with laden flower-boxes. Under her feet was a carpet of blue velvet pile that covered the whole of the room. She looked round open-mouthed at the magnificence of her new home. The dressing-table was an old French model in the Louis Quinze style, inlaid with gold, and the matching wardrobe must have been worth a fortune. Near one window was a lovely writing-table and a well-filled bookcase would almost be within reach of her hand when she lay in bed.

"Are you sure this is my room?" she asked again.

"Yes, miss," said the housekeeper, "and this," she opened a door, "is your bathroom. There is a bath to every room. Mr. Groat had the house reconstructed when he came into it."

The girl opened one of the French windows and stepped on to the balcony which ran along to a square and larger balcony built above the porch of the house. This, she discovered, opened from a landing above the stairs.

She did not see Mrs. Groat again that afternoon and when she enquired she discovered that the old lady was lying down with a bad headache. Nor was she to meet Digby Groat. Her first meal was eaten in solitude.

"Mr. Groat has not come back from the country," explained Jackson, who waited on her. "Are you comfortable, miss?"

"Quite, thank you," she said.

There was an air about this man which she did not like. It was not that he failed in respect, or that he was in any way familiar, but there was something proprietorial in his attitude. It almost seemed as though he had a financial interest in the place and she was glad when her meal was finished. She went straight up to her room a little dissatisfied that she had not met her employer. There were many things which she wanted to ask Mrs. Groat; and particularly did she wish to know what days she would be free.

Presently she switched out the light, and opening the French windows, stepped out into the cool, fragrant night. The afterglow of the sun still lingered in the sky. The square was studded with lights, an almost incessant stream of motor-car traffic passed under her window, for Grosvenor Square is the short cut between Oxford Street and Piccadilly.

The stars spangled the clear sky with a million specks of quivering light. Against the jeweled robe

of the northern heavens, the roofs and steeples and stacks of London had a mystery and wonder which only the light of day could dispel. And in the majestic solitude of the night, Eunice's heart seemed to swell until she could scarcely breathe. It was not the magic of stars that brought the blood flaming to her face; nor the music of the trees. It was the flash of understanding that one half of her, one splendid fragment of the pattern on which her life was cut, was somewhere there in the darkness asleep perhaps—thinking of her, she prayed. She saw his face with startling distinctness, saw the tender kindness of his eyes, felt on her moist palm the pressure of those strong brown fingers. . . .

With a sigh which was half a sob she closed the window and drew the silken curtains, shutting out the immortal splendors of nature from her view.

Five minutes later she was asleep.

How long she slept she did not know. It must have been hours she thought. The stream of traffic had ceased and there was no sound from outside, save the distant hoot of a motor-horn. The room was in darkness, and yet she was conscious that somebody was there!

She sat up in bed and a cold shiver ran down her spine. Somebody was in the room! She reached out to turn on the light and could have shrieked, for she touched a hand, a cold, small hand that was resting on the bedside table. For a second she was paralyzed and then the hand was suddenly withdrawn. There was a rustle of curtain rings and the momentary glimpse of a figure against the lesser gloom of the night, and shaking in every limb, she leapt from the bed and

switched on the light. The room was empty, but the French window was ajar.

And then she saw on the table by her side, a gray card. Picking it up with shaking hands she read:

"One who loves you, begs you for your life and honor's sake to leave this house."

It bore no other signature than a small blue hand.

She dropped the card on the bed and stood staring at it for a while and then, slipping into her dressing-gown she unlocked the door of her room and went out into the passage. A dim light was burning at the head of the stairs. She was terror-stricken, hardly knew what she was doing, and she seemed to fly down the stairs.

She must find somebody, some living human creature, some reality to which she could take hold. But the house was silent. The hall lamp was burning and by its light she saw the old clock and was dimly conscious that she could hear its solemn ticking. It was three o'clock. There must be somebody awake in the house. The servants might still be up, she thought wildly, and ran down a passage to what she thought was the entrance to the servants' hall. She opened a door and found herself in another passage illuminated by one light at the farther end, where further progress was arrested by a white door. She raced along until she came to the door and tried to open it. There was no handle and it was a queer door. It was not made of wood, but of padded canvas.

And then as she stood bewildered, there came from behind the padded door a squeal of agony, so shrill, so full of pain that her blood seemed to turn to ice.

Again it shrieked and turning she fled back the way she had come, through the hall to the front door. Her trembling fingers fumbled at the key and presently the lock snapped and the door flew open. She staggered out on to the broad steps of the house and stopped, for a man was sitting on the head of those steps.

He turned his face as the door opened and in the light from the hall he was revealed. It was Jim Steele!

## CHAPTER FIVE

JIM came stumbling to his feet, staring in blank amazement at the unexpected apparition and for a moment thus they stood, facing one another, the girl stricken dumb with fear and surprise.

She thought he was part of a dreadful dream, an image that was conjured by her imagination and would presently vanish.

"Jim—Mr. Steele!" she gasped.

In a stride he was by her side, his arm about her shoulder.

"What is wrong?" he asked quickly, and in his anxiety his voice was almost harsh.

She shuddered and dropped her head on his breast.

"Oh, it was dreadful, dreadful!" she whispered and he heard the note of horror in her low voice.

"May I ask what is the meaning of this?" demanded a suave voice, and with a start the girl turned.

A man was standing in the doorway and for a second she did not recognize him. Even Jim, who had seen Digby Groat at close quarters, did not know him in his unusual attire. He was dressed in a long white overall which reached from his throat to his feet; over his head was a white cap which fitted him so that not a particle of his hair could be seen. Bands of white elastic held his cuffs close to his wrists and both hands were hidden in brown rubber gloves.

"May I again ask you, Miss Weldon, why you are standing on my doorstep in the middle of the night,

attired in clothes which I do not think are quite suitable for street wear? Perhaps you will come inside and explain," he said stepping back; "Grosvenor Square is not quite used to this form of midnight entertainment."

Still clutching Jim's arm the girl went slowly back to the passage and Digby shut the door.

"And Mr. Steele, too," said Digby with ironic surprise, "you're a very early caller."

Jim said nothing. His attention was wholly devoted to the girl. She was trembling from head to foot, and he found a chair for her.

"There are a few explanations due," he said coolly, "but I rather think they are from you, Mr. Groat."

"From me?" Mr. Groat was genuinely unprepared for that demand.

"So far as my presence is concerned, that can be explained in a minute," said Jim. "I was outside the house a few moments ago when the door swung open and Miss Weldon ran out in a state of abject terror. Perhaps you will tell me, Mr. Groat, why this lady is reduced to such a condition?"

There was a cold menace in his tone which Digby Groat did not like to hear.

"I have not the slightest idea what it is all about," he said. "I have been working in my laboratory for the last half-hour, and the first intimation I had that anything was wrong was when I heard the door open."

The girl had recovered now, and some of the color had returned to her face, yet her voice shook as she recited the incidents of the night, both men listening attentively.

Jim took particular notice of the man's attitude, and

he was satisfied in his mind that Digby Groat was as much in ignorance of the visit to the girl's room as he himself. When she had finished, Groat nodded.

"The terrifying cry you heard from my laboratory," he smiled, "is easily explained. Nobody was being hurt, at least if he was being hurt, it was for his own good. When I came back to my house to-night I found my little dog had a piece of glass in its paw, and I was extracting it."

She drew a sigh of relief.

"I'm so sorry I made such a fuss," she said penitently, "but I—I was frightened."

"You are sure somebody was in your room?" asked Digby.

"Absolutely certain." She had not told him about the card.

"They came through the French window from the balcony?"

She nodded.

"May I see your room?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"I will go in first to tidy it," she said. She remembered the card was on the bed, and she was particularly anxious that it should not be read.

Uninvited Jim Steele followed Digby upstairs into the beautiful room. The magnificence of the room, its hangings and costly furniture, did not fail to impress him, but the impression he received was not favorable to Digby Groat.

"Yes, the window is ajar. You are sure you fastened it?"

The girl nodded.

"Yes. I left both fanlights down to get the air."



she pointed above, "but I fastened these doors. I distinctly remember that."

"But if this person came in from the balcony," said Digby, "how did he or she get there?"

He opened the French door and stepped out into the night, walking along the balcony until he came to the square space above the porch. There was another window here which gave on to the landing at the head of the stairs. He tried it—it was fastened. Coming back through the girl's room he discovered that not only was the catch in its socket, but the key was turned.

"Strange," he muttered.

His first impression had been that it was his mother who, with her strange whims, had been searching the room for some trumpery trinket which had taken her fancy. But the old woman was not sufficiently agile to climb a balcony nor had she the courage to make a midnight foray.

"My own impression is that you dreamt it, Miss Weldon," he said with a smile. "And now I advise you to go to bed and to sleep. I'm sorry that you've had this unfortunate introduction to my house."

He had made no reference to the providential appearance of Jim Steele, nor did he speak of this until they had said good-night to the girl and had passed down the stairs into the hall again.

"Rather a coincidence, your being here, Mr. Steele," he said. "What were you doing? Studying dactylology?"

"Something like that," said Jim coolly.

Mr. Digby Groat searched for a cigarette in his pocket and lit it.

"I should have thought that your work was so arduous that you would not have time for early morning strolls in Grosvenor Square."

"Would you really?" said Jim, and then suddenly Digby laughed.

"You're a queer devil," he said. "Come along and see my laboratory."

Jim was anxious to see the laboratory and the invitation saved him from the necessity of making further reference to the terrifying cry which Eunice had heard.

They turned down a long passage through the padded door and came to a large annexe, the walls of which were of white glazed brick. There was no window, the light in the daytime being admitted through a glass roof. Now, however, these were covered by blue blinds and the room owed its illumination to two powerful lights which hung above a small table. It was not an ordinary table, its legs were of thin iron, terminating in rubber-tired casters. The top was of white enameled iron, with curious little screw holds occurring at intervals.

It was not the table so much as the occupant which interested Jim. Fastened down by two iron bands, one of which was about its neck and one about the lower portion of its body, its four paws fastened by thin cords, was a dog, a rough-haired terrier who turned its eyes upon Jim with an expression of pleading so human that Jim could almost feel the message that the poor little thing was sending.

"Your dog, eh?" said Jim.

Digby looked at him.

"Yes," he said, "why?"

"Haven't you finished taking the glass out of his paw?"

"Not quite," said the other coolly.

"By-the-way, you don't keep him very clean," Jim said.

Digby turned.

"What the devil are you hinting at?" he asked.

"I am merely suggesting that this is not your dog, but a poor stray terrier which you picked up in the street half-an-hour ago and enticed into this house."

"Well?"

"I'll save you further trouble by saying that I saw you pick it up."

Digby's eyes narrowed.

"Oh, you did, did you?" he said softly. "So you were spying on me?"

"Not exactly spying on you," said Jim calmly, "but merely satisfying my idle curiosity."

His hand fell on the dog and he stroked its ears gently.

Digby laughed.

"Well, if you know that, I might as well tell you that I am going to evacuate the sensory nerve. I've always been curious to——"

Jim looked around.

"Where is your anæsthetic?" he asked gently, and he was most dangerous when his voice sank to that soft note.

"Anæsthetic? Good lord," scoffed the other, "you don't suppose I'm going to waste money on chloroform for a dog, do you?"

His fingers rested near the poor brute's head and the dog, straining forward, licked the torturer's hand.

"Filthy little beast!" said Digby picking up a towel. He took a thick rubber band, slipped it over the dog's mouth and nose.

"Now lick," he laughed, "I think that will stop his yelping. You're a bit chicken-hearted, aren't you, Mr. Steele? You don't realize that medical science advances by its experiments on animals."

"I realize the value of vivisection under certain conditions," said Jim quietly, "but all decent doctors who experiment on animals relieve them of their pain before they use the knife; and all doctors, whether they are decent or otherwise, receive a certificate of permission from the Board of Trade before they begin their experiments. Where is your certificate?"

Digby's face darkened.

"Look here, don't you come here trying to bully me," he blustered. "I brought you here just to show you my laboratory——"

"And if you hadn't brought me in," interrupted Jim, "I should jolly well have walked in, because I wasn't satisfied with your explanation. Oh, yes, I know, you're going to tell me that the dog was only frightened and the yell she heard was when you put that infernal clamp on his neck. Now, I'll tell you something, Mr. Digby Groat, I'll give you three minutes to get the clamp off that dog."

Digby's yellow face was puckered with rage.

"And if I don't?" he breathed.

"I'll put you where the dog is," said Jim. "And please don't persuade yourself that I couldn't do it!"

There was a moment's silence.

"Take the clamps off that dog," said Jim.

Digby looked at him.

For a moment they gazed at one another and there was a look of malignity in the eyes that dropped before Jim's. Another minute and the dog was free.

Jim lifted the shivering little animal in his arms and rubbed its bony head, and Digby watched him glowering, his teeth showing in his rage.

"I'll remember this," he snarled. "By God, you shall rue the day you ever interfered with me!"

Jim's steady eyes met the man's.

"I have never feared a threat in my life," he said quietly. "I'm not likely to be scared now. I admit that vivisection is necessary under proper conditions, but men like you who torture harmless animals from a sheer lust of cruelty, are bringing discredit upon the noblest of professions. You hurt in order to satisfy your own curiosity. You have not the slightest intention of using the knowledge you gain for the benefit of suffering humanity. When I came into this laboratory," he said—he was standing at the door as he spoke—"there were two brutes here. I am leaving the bigger one behind."

He slammed the padded door and walked out into the passage, leaving a man whose vanity was hurt beyond forgiveness.

Then to his surprise Groat heard Jim's footsteps returning and his visitor came in.

"Did you close your front door when you went upstairs?"

Digby's eyebrows rose. He forgot for the moment the insult that had been offered him.

"Yes—why?"

"It is wide open now," said Jim. "I guess your midnight visitor has gone home."

## CHAPTER SIX

**I**N the cheerful sunlight of the morning all Eunice's fear had vanished and she felt heartily ashamed of herself that she had made such a commotion in the night. And yet there was the card. She took it from under her pillow and read it again, with a puzzled frown. Somebody had been in the room, but it was not a somebody whom she could regard as an enemy. Then a thought struck her that made her heart leap. Could it have been Jim? She shook her head. Somehow she was certain it was not Jim, and she flushed at the thought. It was not his hand she had touched. She knew the shape and contour of that. It was warm and firm, almost electric; that which she had touched had been the hand of somebody who was old, of that she was sure.

She went down to breakfast to find Groat standing before the fire, a debonair perfectly-dressed man, who showed no trace of fatigue, though he had not gone to bed until four o'clock.

He gave her a cheery greeting.

"Good morning, Miss Weldon," he said, "I hope you have recovered from your nightmare."

"I gave you a lot of trouble," she said with a rueful smile, "I am so very sorry."

"Nonsense," he said heartily. "I am only glad that our friend Steele was there to appease you. By-the-way, Miss Weldon, I owe you an apology. I told you a lie last night."

She looked at him open-eyed.

"Did you, Mr. Groat," she said, and then with a laugh, "I am sure it wasn't a very serious one."

"It was really. I told you that my little dog had a piece of glass in his paw; the truth was that it wasn't my dog at all, but a dog that I picked up in the street. I intended making an experiment upon him. You know I am a doctor."

She shivered.

"Oh, that was the noise?" she asked with a wry little face.

He shook his head.

"No, he was just scared, he hadn't been hurt at all—and in truth I didn't intend hurting him. Your friend, however, persuaded me to let the little beggar go."

She drew a long sigh of relief.

"I'm so glad," she said. "I should have felt awful."

He laughed softly as he took his place at the table.

"Steele thought I was going to experiment without chloroform, but that, of course, was absurd. It is difficult to get the unprofessional man to realize what an enormous help to medical science these experiments are. Of course," he said airily, "they are conducted without the slightest pain to the animal. I should no more think of hurting a little dog than I should think of hurting you."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," she said warmly.

Digby Groat was a clever man. He knew that Jim would meet the girl again and would give her his version of the scene in the laboratory. It was necessary, therefore, that he should get his story in first, for 'his girl whom he had brought to the house for his amusement, was more lovely than he had dreamt and he desired to stand well with her.

Digby, who was a connoisseur in female beauty, had rather dreaded the morning meal. The beauty of women seldom survives the cruel searchlight which the gray eastern light throws upon their charms. Love had never touched him, though many women had come and gone in his life. Eunice Weldon was a more thrilling adventure, something that would surely brighten a dreary week or two; an interest to stimulate him until another stimulation came into sight.

She survived the ordeal magnificently, he thought. The tender texture of the skin, untouched by an artificial agent, was flawless, the eyes bright and vigorous with life, sparkled with health; the hands that lay upon the table, when she was listening to him, were perfectly and beautifully molded.

She on her side was neither attracted nor repelled. Digby Groat was just a man. One of the thousands of men who pass and repass in the corridor of life; some seen, some unnoticed, some interesting, some abhorrent. Some stop to speak, some pass hurriedly by and disappear through strange doors never to be seen again. He had "stopped to speak" but had he vanished from sight through one of those doors of mystery she would neither have been sorry or glad.

"My mother never comes to breakfast," said Digby half-way through the meal. "Do you think you will like your work?"

"I don't know what it is, yet," she answered, her eyes twinkling.

"Mother is rather peculiar," he said, "and just a little eccentric, but I think you will be sensible enough to get on with her. And the work will not be very



heavy at first. I am hoping later that you will be able to assist me in my anthropological classification."

"That sounds terribly important," she said. "What does it mean?"

"I am making a study of faces and heads," he said easily, "and to that end I have collected thousands of photographs from all parts of the world. I hope to get a million. It is a science which is very much neglected in this country. It appears to be the exclusive monopoly of the Italians. You have probably heard of Mantaganza and Lombroso?"

She nodded.

"They are the great criminal scientists, aren't they?" she said to his surprise.

"Oh, I see, you know something about it. Yes, I suppose you would call them criminal scientists."

"It sounds fascinating," she said looking at him in wonder, "and I should like to help you if your mother can spare me."

"Oh, she'll spare you," he said.

Her hand lay on the table invitingly near to his, but he did not move. He was a quick, accurate judge of human nature. He knew that to touch her would be the falsest of moves. If it had been another woman—yes, his hand would have closed gently over hers, there would have been a giggle of embarrassment, a dropping of eyes, and the rest would have been so easy. But if he had followed that course with her, he knew that evening would find her gone. He could wait, and she was worth waiting for. She was gloriously lovely he thought. Half the pleasure of life lies in the chase, and the chase is no more than a violent form of

anticipation. Some men find their greatest joy in visions that must sooner or later materialize, and Digby Groat was one of these.

She looked up and saw his burning eyes fixed on her and flushed. With an effort she looked again and he was a normal man.

Was it an illusion of hers, she wondered?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**T**HE first few days of her engagement were very trying to Eunice Weldon.

Mrs. Groat did not overwork her, indeed Eunice's complaint was that the old woman refused to give her any work at all.

On the third day at breakfast she spoke on the matter to Digby Groat.

"I'm afraid I am not very much use here, Mr. Groat," she said, "it is a sin to take your money."

"Why?" he asked quickly.

"Your mother prefers to write her own letters," she said, "and really those don't seem to be very many!"

"Nonsense," he said sharply and seeing that he had startled the girl he went on in a much gentler tone: "you see, my mother is not used to service of any kind. She's one of those women who prefer to do things for themselves, and she has simply worn herself to a shadow because of this independence of hers. There are hundreds of jobs that she could give you to do! You must make allowance for old women, Miss Weldon. They take a long time to work up confidence in strangers."

"I realize that," she nodded.

"Poor mother is rather bewildered by her own magnificence," he smiled, "but I am sure when she gets to know you you will find your days very fully occupied."

He left the morning room and went straight into his

mother's little parlor, and found her in her dressing-room crouching over a tiny fire. He closed the door carefully and walked across to her and she looked up with a little look of fear in her eyes.

"Why aren't you giving this girl work to do?" he asked sharply.

"There's nothing for her to do," she wailed. "My dear, she is such an expense, and I don't like her."

"You'll give her work to do from to-day," he said, "and don't let me tell you again!"

"She'll only spy on me," said Mrs. Groat fretfully, "and I never write letters, you know that. I haven't written a letter for years until you made me write that note to the lawyer."

"You'll find work for her to do," repeated Digby Groat. "Do you understand? Get all the accounts that we've had for the past two years, and let her sort them out and make a list of them. Give her your bank account. Let her compare the checks with the counterfoils. Give her anything. Damn you! You don't want me to tell you every day, do you?"

"I'll do it, I'll do it, Digby," she said hurriedly. "You're very hard on me, my boy. I hate this house," she said with sudden vehemence. "I hate the people in it. I looked into her room this morning and it is like a palace. It must have cost us thousands of pounds to furnish that room, and all for a work girl—it is sinful!"

"Never mind about that," he said. "Find something to occupy her time for the next fortnight."

The girl was surprised that morning when Mrs. Groat sent for her.

"I've one or two little tasks for you, Miss — I never remember your name."

"Eunice," said the girl smiling.

"I don't like the name of Eunice," grumbled the old woman. "The last one was Lola! A foreign girl. I was glad when she left. Haven't you got another name?"

"Weldon is my other name," said the girl good-humoredly, "and you can call me 'Weldon' or 'Eunice' or anything you like, Mrs. Groat."

The old woman sniffed.

She had in front of her a big drawer packed with checks which had come back from the bank.

"Go through these," she said, "and do something with them. I don't know what."

"Perhaps you want me to fasten them to the counter-foils," said the girl.

"Yes, yes, that's it," said Mrs. Groat. "You don't want to do it here, do you? Yes, you'd better do it here," she went on hastily, "I don't want the servants prying into my accounts."

Eunice put the drawer on the table, gathered together the stubs of the check books, and with a little bottle of gum began her work, the old woman watching her.

When, for greater comfort, the girl took off the gold wrist watch which she wore, a present from her dead father, Mrs. Groat's greedy eyes focussed upon it and a look of animation came into the dull face.

It looked like a long job, but Eunice was a methodical worker, and when the gong in the hall sounded for lunch, she had finished her labors.

"There, Mrs. Groat," she said with a smile, "I think that is the lot. All your checks are here."

She put away the drawer and looked round for her watch, but it had disappeared. It was at that moment that Digby Groat opened the door and walked in.

"Hullo, Miss Weldon," he said with his engaging smile, "I've come back for lunch. Did you hear the gong, mother? You ought to have let Miss Weldon go."

But the girl was looking round.

"Have you lost anything?" asked Digby quickly.

"My little watch. I put it down a few minutes ago, and it seems to have vanished," she said.

"Perhaps it is in the drawer," stammered the old woman avoiding her son's eye.

Digby looked at her for a moment then turned to Eunice.

"Will you please ask Jackson to order my car for three o'clock?" he asked gently.

He waited until the door closed behind the girl and then:

"Where is that watch?" he asked.

"The watch, Digby?" quavered the old woman.

"The watch, curse you!" he said, his face black with rage.

She put her hand into her pocket reluctantly and produced it.

"It was so pretty," she sniveled, and he snatched it from her hand.

A minute later Eunice returned.

"We have found your watch," he said with a smile. "You had dropped it under the table."

"I thought I'd looked there," she said. "It is not a valuable watch, but it serves a double purpose."

She was preparing to put it on.

"What other purpose than to tell you the time?" asked Digby.

"It hides a very ugly scar," she said, and extended her wrist. "Look." She pointed to a round red mark, the size of a sixpence. It looked like a recent burn.

"That's queer," said Digby looking, and then he heard a strangled sound from his mother. Her face was twisted and distorted, her eyes were glaring at the girl's wrist.

"Digby, Digby!" her voice was a thin shriek of sound. "Oh, my God!"

And she fell across the table and before he could reach her, had dropped to the floor in an inert heap.

Digby stooped over his mother and then turned his head slowly to the frightened girl.

"It was the scar on your hand that did it," he said slowly, "what does it mean?"

## CHAPTER EIGHT

THE story of the scar and the queer effect it had produced on Mrs. Groat puzzled Jim almost as much as it had worried the girl. He offered his wild theory again and she laughed.

"Of course I shall leave," she said, "but I must stay until all Mrs. Groat's affairs are cleared up. There are heaps of letters and documents of all kinds which I have to index," she said; "at least Mr. Groat told me there were. And it seems so unfair to run away whilst the poor old lady is so ill. As to my being the young lady of fortune, that is absurd. My parents were South Africans. Jim, you are too romantic to be a good detective."

He indulged in the luxury of a taxi to carry her back to Grosvenor Square and this time went with her to the house, taking his leave at the door.

Whilst they were talking on the step, the door opened and a man was shown out by Jackson. He was a short, thick-set man with an enormous brown beard.

Apparently Jackson did not see the two people on the step, at any rate he did not look toward them, but said in a loud voice:

"Mr. Groat will not be home until seven o'clock, Mr. Villa."

"Tell him I called," said the bearded man with a booming voice, and stepped past Jim, apparently oblivious to his existence.

"Who is the gentleman with the whiskers?" asked Jim, but the girl could give him no information.



Jim was not satisfied with the girl's explanation of her parentage. There was an old school friend of his in business in Cape Town, as an architect, and on his return to his office, Jim sent him a long reply-paid cablegram. He felt that he was chasing shadows, but at present there was little else to chase, and he went home to his flat a little oppressed by the hopelessness of his task.

The next day he had a message from the girl saying that she could not come out that afternoon, and the day was a blank, the more so because that afternoon he received a reply to his cable. The reply destroyed any romantic dreams he might have had as to Eunice Weldon's association with the Danton millions. The message was explicit. Eunice May Weldon had been born at Rondebosch, on the 12th June, 1899; her parents were Henry William Weldon, musician, and Margaret May Weldon. She had been christened at the Wesleyan Chapel at Rondebosch, and both her parents were dead.

The final two lines of the cable puzzled him:

"Similar enquiries made about parentage Eunice Weldon six months ago by Selenger and Co., Brade Street Buildings."

"Selenger and Co.," said Jim thoughtfully. Here was a new mystery. Who else was making enquiries about the girl? He opened a Telephone Directory and looked up the name. There were several Selengers, but none of Brade Street Buildings. He put on his hat, and hailing a taxi, drove to Brade Street, which was near the Bank, and with some difficulty found Brade Street Buildings. It was a moderately large block of offices, and on the indicator at the door, he discovered

Selenger & Co. occupied No. 6 room on the ground door.

The office was locked and apparently unoccupied. He sought the hall-keeper.

"No, sir," said the man shaking his head. "Selengers aren't open. As a matter of fact, nobody's ever there except at night."

"At night," said Jim, "that's an extraordinary time to do business."

The hall-keeper looked at him unfavorably.

"I suppose it is the way they do *their* business, sir,"

It was some time before Jim could appease the ruffled guardian, and then he learnt that Selengers were evidently privileged tenants. A complaint from Selengers had brought the dismissal of his predecessor, and the curiosity of a housekeeper as to what Selengers did so late at night had resulted in that lady being summarily discharged.

"I think they deal with foreign stock," said the porter. "A lot of cables come here, but I've never seen the gentleman who runs the office. He comes in by the side door."

Apparently there was another entrance to Selengers' office, an entrance reached by a small courtyard opening from a side passage. Selengers were the only tenants who had this double means of egress and exit, and also, it seemed, they were the only tenants of the building who were allowed to work all night.

"Even the stockbrokers on the second floor have to shut down at eight o'clock," explained the porter, "and that's pretty hard on them, because when the market is booming, there's work that would keep them going until twelve o'clock. But at eight o'clock, it is

'out you go' with the company that owns this building. The rents aren't high and there are very few offices to be had in the city nowadays. They have always been very strict, even in Mr. Danton's time."

"Mr. Danton's time," said Jim quickly. "Did he own this building? Do you mean Danton, the ship-owner millionaire?"

The man nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said, rather pleased with himself that he had created a sensation. "He sold it, or got rid of it in some way years ago. I happen to know, because I used to be an office-boy in these very buildings, and I remember Mr. Danton—he had an office on the first floor, and a wonderful office it was, too."

"Who occupies it now?"

"A foreign gentleman named Levenski. He's a fellow who's never here, either."

Jim thought the information so valuable that he went to the length of calling up Mr. Salter at his home. But Mr. Salter knew nothing whatever about the Brade Street Buildings except that it had been a private speculation of Danton's. It had come into his hands as the result of the liquidation of the original company and he had disposed of the property without consultation with Salter and Salter.

It was another blank wall.

## CHAPTER NINE

"I SHALL not be in the office to-day, sir. - I have several appointments which may keep me occupied," said Jim Steele, and Mr. Salter sniffed.

"Business, Steele?" he asked politely.

"Not all of them, sir," said Jim. He had a shrewd idea that Mr. Salter guessed what that business was.

"Very good," said Salter, putting on his glasses and addressing himself to the work on his desk.

"There is one thing I want to ask, and that is partly why I came, because I could have explained my absence by telephone."

Mr. Salter put down his pen patiently.

"I cannot understand why this fellow Groat has so many Spanish friends," said Jim. "For example, there is a girl he sees a great deal, the Comtessa Manzana; you have heard of her, sir?"

"I see her name in the papers occasionally," said Mr. Salter.

"And there are several Spaniards he knows. One in particular named Villa. Groat speaks Spanish fluently, too."

"That is curious," said Mr. Salter leaning back in his chair. "His grandfather had a very large number of Spanish friends. I think that somewhere in the background there may have been some Spanish family connection. Old man Danton, that is, Jonathan Danton's father, made most of his money in Spain and in

Central America, and was always entertaining a household of grantees. They were a strange family, the Dantons. They lived in little water-tight compartments, and I believe on the day of his death Jonathan Danton hadn't spoken more than a dozen words to his sister for twenty years. They weren't bad friends, if you understand. It was just the way of the Dantons. There are other families whom I know who do exactly the same thing. A reticent family, with a keen sense of honor."

"Didn't Grandfather Danton leave Mrs. Groat any money? She was one of his two children, wasn't she?"

Septimus Salter nodded.

"He never left her a penny," he said. "She practically lived on the charity of her brother. I never understood why, but the old man took a sudden dislike to her. Jonathan was as much in the dark as I am. He used to discuss it with me and wondered what his sister had done to incur the old man's enmity. His father never told him—would never even discuss the sister with him. It was partly due to the old man's niggardly treatment of Mrs. Groat, that Jonathan Danton made his will as he did.

"Probably her marriage with Groat was one of the causes of the old man's anger. Groat was nothing, a shipping clerk in Danton's Liverpool office. A man ill at ease in good society, without an 'h' to his name, and desperately scared of his wife. The only person who was ever nice to him was poor Lady Mary. His wife hated him for some reason or other. Curiously enough when he died, too, he left all his money to a distant cousin—and he left about £5,000. Where he

got it from heaven knows. And now be off, Steele. The moment you come into this office," said Mr. Salter in despair, "you start me on a string of reminiscences that are deplorably out of keeping with a lawyer's office."

Jim's first call that morning was at the Home Office. He was anxious to clear up the mystery of Madge Benson. Neither Scotland Yard nor the Prisons Commissioners were willing to supply an unofficial investigator with the information he had sought, and in desperation he had applied to the Secretary of State's Department. Fortunately he had a "friend at court" in that building, a middle-aged barrister he had met in France and his inquiry, backed by proof that he was not merely satisfying his personal curiosity, had brought him a note asking him to call.

Mr. Fenningleigh received him in his room with a warmth which showed that he had not forgotten the fact that on one occasion Jim had saved him from what might have been a serious injury, if not death, for Jim had dragged him to cover one night when the British headquarters were receiving the unwelcome attentions of ten German bombers.

"Sit down, Steele. I can't tell you much," said the official picking up a slip of paper from his blotting-pad, "and I'm not sure that I ought to tell you anything! But this is the information which 'prisons' have supplied."

Jim took the slip from the barrister's hand and read the three lines.

"Madge Benson, age 26. Domestic Servant. One month with H. L. for theft. Sentenced at Marylebone Police Court.

June 5, 1898. Committed to Holloway. Released July 2, 1898."

"Theft?" said Jim thoughtfully. "I suppose there is no way of learning the nature of the theft?"

Mr. Fenningleigh shook his head.

"I should advise you to interview the jailer at Marylebone. These fellows have extraordinary memories for faces, and besides there is certain to be a record of the conviction at the court. You had better ask Salter to apply; they will give permission to a lawyer."

But this was the very thing Jim did not want to do.

## CHAPTER TEN

UNICE WELDON was rapidly settling down in her new surroundings. The illness of her employer, so far from depriving her of occupation, gave her more work than she had ever expected. It was true, as Digby Groat had said, that there were plenty of small jobs to fill up her time. At his suggestion she went over the little account books in which Mrs. Groat kept the record of her household expenses, and was astounded to find how parsimonious the old lady had been.

One afternoon when she was tidying the old bureau, she stopped in her work to admire the solid workmanship which the old furniture builders put into their handicraft.

The bureau was one of those old-fashioned affairs, which are half-desk and half-bookcase, the writing-case being enclosed by glass doors covered on the inside with green silk curtains.

It was the thickness of the two side-pieces enclosing the actual desk, which unlike the writing-flap of the ordinary secretaire was immovable, that arrested her attention. She was rubbing her hand admiringly along the polished mahogany surface, when she felt a strip of wood give way under the pressure of her fingertips. To her surprise a little flap about an inch wide and about six inches long had fallen down and hung on its invisible hinges leaving a black cavity. A secret drawer in a secretaire is not an extraordinary discov-



ery, but she wondered whether she ought to explore the recess which her accidental touch had revealed. She put in her fingers and drew out a folded paper. There was nothing else in the drawer, if drawer it could be called.

Ought she to read it, she wondered? If it had been so carefully put away, Mrs. Groat would not wish it to be seen by a third person. Nevertheless it was her duty to discover what the document was and she opened it.

To the top a piece of paper was attached on which a few words were written in Mrs. Groat's hand:

"This is the will referred to in the instructions contained in the sealed envelope which Mr. Salter has in his possession."

The word "Salter" had been struck out and the name of the firm of solicitors which had supplanted the old man had been substituted.

The will was executed on one of those forms which can be purchased at any law stationers. But apart from the preamble it was short:

"I give to my son, Digby Francis Groat, the sum of £20,000 and my house and furniture at 409, Grosvenor Square. The remainder of my estate I give to Ramonez, Marquis of Estremeda, of Calle Receletos, Madrid."

It was witnessed by two names unknown to the girl and as they had described themselves as domestic servants it was probable that they had long since left her employment, for Mrs. Groat did not keep a servant very long.

What should she do with it? She determined to ask Digby.

Later, when going through the drawers of her desk she discovered a small miniature and was startled by the dark beauty of the subject. It was a head and shoulders of a girl wearing her hair in a way which was fashionable in the late seventies. The face was bold, but beautiful, the dark eyes seemed to glow with life. The face of a girl who had her way, thought Eunice as she noted the firm round chin. She wondered who it was and showed it to Digby Groat at lunch.

"Oh, that is a picture of my mother," he said carelessly.

"Your mother?" said Eunice in astonishment, and he chuckled.

"You'd never think she was ever like that, but she was, I believe, a very beautiful girl," his face darkened, "just a little too beautiful," he said, without explaining what he meant.

Suddenly he snatched the miniature from her and looked on the back.

"I'm sorry," he apologized, and a sudden pallor had come to his face. "Mother sometimes writes things on the back of pictures and I was rather——" he was going to say "scared"—"and I was rather embarrassed."

He was almost incoherent, an unusual circumstance, for Digby Groat was the most self-possessed of men.

He changed the subject by introducing an inquiry which he had meant to make some time before.

"Miss Weldon, can you explain that scar on your wrist?" he asked.

She shook her head laughingly.

"I'm almost sorry I showed it to you," she said. "It is ugly, isn't it?"

"Do you know how it happened?"

"I don't know," she said, "mother never told me. It looks rather like a burn."

He examined the little red place attentively.

"Of course," she went on, "it is absurd to think that the sight of my birth mark was the cause of your mother's stroke."

"I suppose it is," he nodded, "but it was a remarkable coincidence."

He had endeavored to find from the old woman the reason of her sudden collapse, but without success. For three days she had lain in her bed speechless and motionless and apparently had neither heard nor seen him when he had made his brief visits to the sick room.

She was recovering now, however, and he intended, at the first opportunity, to demand a full explanation.

"Did you find anything else?" he asked suspiciously. He was never quite sure what new folly his mother might commit. Her passion for other people's property might have come to light.

Should she tell him? He saw the doubt and trouble in her face and repeated his question.

"I found your mother's will," she said.

He had finished his lunch, had pushed back his chair and was smoking peacefully. The cigar dropped from his hand and she saw his face go black.

"Her will!" he said. "Are you sure? Her will is at the lawyer's. It was made two years ago."

"This will was made a few months ago," said Eunice

troubled. "I do hope I haven't betrayed any secret of hers."

"Let me see this precious document," said Digby starting up.

His voice was brusque, almost to rudeness. She wondered what had brought about his sudden change. They walked back to the old woman's shabby room and the girl produced a document from the drawer.

He read it through carefully.

"The old fool," he muttered. "The cussed, driveling old fool! Have you read this?" he asked sharply.

"I read a little of it," admitted the girl, shocked by the man's brutal reference to his mother.

He examined the paper again and all the time he was muttering something under his breath.

"Where did you find this?" he asked harshly.

"I found it by accident," explained Eunice. "There is a little drawer here," she pointed to the seemingly solid side of the bureau in which gaped an oblong cavity.

"I see," said Digby Groat slowly as he folded the paper. "Now, Miss Weldon, perhaps you will tell me how much of this document you *have* read," he tapped the will on his palm.

She did not know exactly what to say. She was Mrs. Groat's servant and she felt it was disloyal even to discuss her private affairs with Digby.

"I read beyond the legacy," she admitted, "I did not read it carefully."

"And you saw that my mother had left me £20,000?" said Digby Groat, "and the remainder to—somebody else?"

She nodded.

"Do you know who that somebody else was?"

"Yes," she said. "To the Marquis of Estremeda."

His face had changed from sallow to red, from red to a dirty gray and his voice as he spoke shook with the rage he could not altogether suppress.

"Do you know how much money my mother will be worth?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Groat," said the girl quietly, "and I don't think you ought to tell me. It is none of my business."

"She will be worth a million and a quarter," he said between his teeth, "and she's left me £20,000 and this damned house!"

He swung round and was making for the door and the girl who guessed his intentions went after him and caught his arm.

"Mr. Groat," she said seriously. "You must not go to your mother. You really must not!"

Her intervention sobered him and he walked slowly back to the fireplace, took a match from his pocket, lit it and before the astonished eyes of the girl applied it to one corner of the document. He watched it until it was black ash and then put his foot upon the débris.

"So much for that!" he said and turning caught the amazed look in the face of Eunice. "You think I've behaved disgracefully, I suppose," he smiled, his old debonair self. "The truth is I am saving my mother's memory from the imputation of madness. There is no Marquis of Estremeda, as far as I know. It is one of the illusions which my mother has, that a Spanish nobleman once befriended her. That is the dark secret of our family, Miss Weldon," he laughed, but she knew that he was lying.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE door of Digby Groat's study was ajar, and he caught a glimpse of Eunice as she came in and made her way up to her room. She had occupied a considerable amount of his thoughts that afternoon, and he had cursed himself that he had been betrayed into revealing the ugly side of his nature before one whom he wished to impress. But there was another matter troubling him. In his folly he had destroyed a legal document in the presence of a witness and had put himself into her power. Suppose his mother died, he thought, and the question of a will arose? Suppose Estremeda got hold of her, her testimony in the courts of law might destroy the value of his mother's earlier will and bring him into the dock at the Old Bailey.

It was an axiom of his that great criminals are destroyed by small causes. The spendthrift who dissipates hundreds of thousands of pounds, finds himself made bankrupt by a paltry hundred pounds, and the clever organizer of the Thirteen who had covered his traces so perfectly that the shrewdest police in the world had not been able to associate him with their many crimes, might easily be brought to book through a piece of stupidity which was dictated by rage and offended vanity. He was now more than ever determined that Eunice Weldon should come within his influence, so that her power for mischief should be

broken before she knew how crushingly it might be employed.

It was not an unpleasant task he set himself, for Eunice exercised a growing fascination over him. Her beauty and her singular intelligence were sufficient lures, but to a man of his temperament the knowledge that she added to these gifts a purity of mind and soul gave her an added value. That she was in the habit of meeting the man he hated, he knew. His faithful Jackson had trailed the girl twice, and on each occasion had returned with the same report. Eunice Weldon was meeting Steele in the park. And the possibility that Jim loved her was the greatest incentive of all to his vile plan.

He could strike at Jim through the girl, could befoul the soul that Jim Steele loved best in the world. That would be a noble revenge, he thought, as he sat, pen in hand, and heard her light footsteps pass up the stairs. But he must be patient and the game must be played cautiously. He must gain her confidence. That was essential, and the best way of securing this end was to make no reference to these meetings, to give her the fullest opportunity for seeing Jim Steele and to avoid studiously any suggestion that he himself had an interest in her.

He had not sought an interview with his mother. She had been sleeping all the afternoon, the nurse had told him and he felt that he could be patient here also. At night when he saw the girl at dinner, he made a reference to the scene she had witnessed in the old woman's sitting-room.

"You'll think I'm an awful cad, Miss Weldon," he said frankly, "but mother has a trick of making me

more angry than any other person I have met. You look upon me as a very unfilial son?" he smiled.

"We do things we're ashamed of sometimes when we are angry," said Eunice, willing to find an excuse for the outburst. She would gladly have avoided the topic altogether, for her conscience was pricking her and she felt guilty when she remembered that she had spoken to Jim on the subject. Digby Groat was to make her a little more uncomfortable by his next remark.

"It is unnecessary for me to tell you, Miss Weldon," he said, with his smile, "that all which happens within these four walls is confidential. I need not express any fear that you will ever speak to an outsider about our affairs."

He had only to look at the crimson face, at the downcast eyes and the girl's fingers playing nervously with the silver, to realize that she had already spoken of the will, and again he cursed himself for his untimely exhibition of temper.

He passed on, to the girl's great relief, to another subject. He was having certain alterations made in his laboratory and was enthusiastic about a new electrical appliance which he had installed.

"Would you like to see my little den, Miss Weldon?" he asked.

"I should very much," said the girl.

She was, she knew, being despicably insincere. She did not want to see the laboratory. To her, since Jim had described the poor little dog who had been stretched upon the table, it was a place of horror. But she was willing to agree to anything that would take Digby



Groat from the topic of the will, and the thought of her own breach of faith.

There was nothing very dreadful in the laboratory she discovered. It was so white and clean and neat that her womanly instinct for orderliness could admire the well-arranged little room, with its shelves packed with bottles, its delicate glass retorts and its strange and mysterious instruments.

He did not open the locked doors that hid one cupboard which stood at one end of the laboratory, so she knew nothing of the grisly relics of his investigations. She was now glad she had seen the place, but was nevertheless as pleased to return to the drawing-room.

Digby went out at nine o'clock and she was left alone to read and to amuse herself as best she could. She called at Mrs. Groat's room on her way up and learned from the nurse that the old lady was rapidly recovering.

"She will be quite normal to-morrow or the next day," said the nurse.

Here was another relief. Mrs. Groat's illness had depressed the girl. It was so terrible to see one who had been as beautiful as the miniature proved her to have been, struck down and rendered a helpless mass, incapable of thought or movement.

Her room, which had impressed her by its beauty the day she had arrived had now been enhanced by the deft touches which only a woman's fingers can give. She had read some of the books which Digby Groat had selected for her entertainment and some she had dipped into only to reject.

She spent the evening with "The Virginian," and

here Digby had introduced her to one of the most delightful creatures of fiction. The Virginian was rather like Jim she thought—but then all the heroes of all the books she read were rather like Jim.

Searching in her bag for her handkerchief her fingers closed on the little card which had been left on her table the night of her introduction to the Grosvenor Square household. She took it out and read it for the twentieth time, puzzling over the identity of the sender and the object he had in view.

What was the meaning of that little blue hand, she wondered? And what was the story which lay behind it?

She put down her book and rising, switched on the lamp over her writing table, examining the card curiously. She had not altered her first impression that the hand had been made by a rubber stamp. It was really a beautiful little reproduction of an open palm and every line was distinct. Who was her mysterious friend—or was he a friend? She shook her head. It could not be Jim, and yet—— It worried her even to think of Jim in this connection. Whoever it was, she thought with a little smile, they had been wrong. She had not left the house and nothing had happened to her, and she felt a sense of pride and comfort in the thought that the mysterious messenger could know nothing of Jim, her guardian angel.

She heard a step in the passage and somebody knocked at her door. It was Digby Groat. He had evidently just come in.

"I saw your light," he said, "so I thought I would give you something I have brought back from the Ambassadors Club."

The "something" was a big square box tied with lavender ribbon.

"For me?" she said in surprise.

"They were distributing them to the guests," he said, "and I thought you might have a taste for sweeties. They are the best chocolates in England."

She laughed and thanked him. He made no further attempt to continue the conversation, but with a nod, went to his room. She heard the door open and close, and five minutes later it opened again and his soft footsteps faded away.

He was going to his laboratory, she thought, and wondered, with a shiver, what was the experiment he was attempting that night.

She had placed the box on the table and had forgotten about it until she was preparing for bed, then she untied the pretty ribbons and displayed the contents.

"They're delicious," she murmured, and took one up in her fingers——

*Thump!*

She turned quickly and dropped the chocolate from her fingers.

Something had hit against her window, it sounded like a fist. She ran to the silken curtains which covered the glass doors from view and hesitated nervously for a moment; then with a little catch of breath she thought that possibly some boys had thrown a ball.

She pulled back the curtains violently and for a moment saw nothing. The balcony was clear and she unfastened the latch and stepped out. There was nobody in sight. She looked on the floor of the balcony

for the object which had been thrown but could find nothing.

She went slowly back to her room and was closing the door when she saw and gasped. For on one of the panes was the life-size print of the Blue Hand!

Again that mysterious warning!

## CHAPTER TWELVE

EUNICE gazed at the hand spell-bound, but she was now more curious than alarmed. Opening the window again, she felt gingerly at the impression. It was wet, and her finger-tip was stained a deep greasy blue, which wiped off readily on her handkerchief. Again she stepped out on to the balcony, and following it along, came to the door leading to the head of the stairs. She tried it. It was locked. Leaning over the parapet she surveyed the square. She saw a man and a woman walking along and talking together and the sound of their laughter came up to her. At the corner of the square she saw passing under a street-lamp a helmeted policeman who must, she calculated, have been actually in front of the house when the imprint was made.

She was about to withdraw to her room when looking down over the portico she saw the figure of a woman descending the steps of the house. Who was she? Eunice knew all the servants by now and was certain this woman was a stranger. She might, of course, be one of Digby Groat's friends or a friend of the nurse, but her subsequent movements were so unusual that Eunice was sure that this was the mysterious stranger who had left her mark on the window. So it was a woman, after all, thought Eunice in amazement, as she watched her cross the square to where a big limousine was waiting.

Without giving any instructions to the chauffeur the woman in black stepped into the car, which immediately moved off.

Eunice went back to the room and sat down in a chair to try to straighten her tangled mind. That hand was intended as a warning, she was sure of that. And now it was clear which way the visitor had come. She must have entered the house by the front door and have got on to the balcony through the door on the landing, locking it after her when she made her escape.

Looking in the glass, Eunice saw that her face was pale but inwardly she felt more thrilled than frightened, and she had also a sense of protection, for instinctively she knew that the woman of the Blue Hand was a friend. Should she go downstairs and tell Digby Groat? She shook her head at the thought. No, she would reserve this little mystery for Jim to unravel. With a duster, which she kept in one of the cupboards, she wiped the blue impression from the window and then sat down on the edge of her bed to puzzle out the intricate and baffling problem.

Why had the woman chosen this method of warning her? Why not employ the mundane method of sending her a letter? Twice she had taken a risk to impress Eunice with the sense of danger, when the same warning might have been conveyed to her through the agency of the postman.

Eunice frowned at this thought, but then she began to realize that had an anonymous letter arrived, she would have torn it up and thrown it into her waste paper basket. These midnight visitations were intended to impress upon the girl the urgency of the visitor's fear for her.

It was not by any means certain that the woman who had left the house was the mysterious visitor. Eunice had never troubled to inquire into Digby Groat's character, nor did she know any of his friends. The lady in black might well have been an acquaintance of his and to tell Digby of the warning and all that she had seen, could easily create a very embarrassing situation for all concerned.

She went to bed, but it was a long time before sleep came to her. She dozed and woke and dozed again and at last decided to get up. She pulled aside the curtains to let in the morning light. The early traffic was rumbling through the street and the clear fragrance of the unsullied air came coldly as she stood and shivered by the open window. She was hungry, as hungry as a healthy girl can be in that keen atmosphere, and she bethought herself of the box of chocolates which Digby had brought to her. She had taken one from its paper wrapping and it was between her teeth when she remembered with a start that the warning had come at the very moment she was about to eat a chocolate! She put it down again thoughtfully and went back to bed to pass the time which must elapse before the servants were about and any kind of food procurable.

Jim Steele was about to leave his little flat in Featherdale Mansions that morning, when he was met at the door by a district messenger carrying a large parcel and a bulky letter. He at once recognized the handwriting of Eunice and carried the parcel into his study. The letter was written hurriedly and was full of apologies. As briefly as possible Eunice had related the events of the night.

"I cannot imagine that the chocolates had anything to do with it, but somehow you are communicating your prejudice against Digby Groat to me. I have no reason whatever to suspect him of any bad design toward me and in sending these I am merely doing as you told me, to communicate everything unusual. Aren't I an obedient girl! And, please Jim, will you take me out to dinner to-night. It is 'my night out,' and I'd love to have a leisurely meal with you, and I'm simply dying to talk about the Blue Hand! Isn't it gorgeously mysterious! I shall try to catch up some of my arrears of sleep this afternoon so that I shall be fresh and brilliant." (She had written "and beautiful" in mockery but had scratched it out.)

Jim Steele whistled. Hitherto he had regarded the Blue Hand as a convenient and accidental method which the unknown had chosen for his or her signature. Now, however, it obtained a new significance. The Blue Hand had been chosen deliberately and for some reason which must be known to one of the parties concerned. To Digby Groat? Jim shook his head. Somehow he knew for certain that the Blue Hand would be as much of a mystery to Digby Groat as it was to the girl and himself. He had no particular reason for thinking this. It was one of those immediate instincts which carry their own conviction. But who else was concerned? He determined to ask his employer that morning if the Blue Hand suggested anything to him.

In the meantime there were the chocolates. He examined the box carefully. The sweetmeats were beautifully arranged and the box bore the label of a well-known West End confectioner. He took out three or



four of the chocolates, placed them carefully in an envelope and put the envelope in his pocket.

Then he set forth to the city. As he closed his own door his eye went to the door on the opposite side of the landing, where dwelt Mrs. Fane and the mysterious Madge Benson. The door was ajar and he thought he heard the woman's voice on the ground floor below talking to the porter of the flats.

His foot was extended to descend the first of the stairs when from the flat came a sharp scream and a voice: "Madge, Madge, help!"

Without a second's hesitation he pushed open the door and ran down the passage. There were closed doors on either side, but the last on the right was open and a thin cloud of smoke was pouring forth. He rushed in, just as the woman, who was lying on the bed, was rising on her elbow as though she were about to get up, and tearing down the blazing curtains at one of the windows, stamped out the fire. It was all over in a few seconds and he had extinguished the last spark of fire from the blackened lace before he looked round at the occupant of the bed, who was staring at him wide-eyed.

She was a woman of between forty and forty-five he judged, with a face whose delicate molding instantly impressed him. He thought he had seen her before, but knew that he must have been mistaken. The big eyes, gray and luminous, the dark brown hair in which a streak of gray had appeared, the beautiful hands that lay on the coverlet, all of these he took in at one glance.

"I'm very greatly obliged to you, Mr. Steele," said

the lady in a voice that was little above a whisper. "That is the second accident we have had. A spark from one of the engines must have blown in through the open window."

Just beneath her was the cutting of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, and Jim who had watched the heavily-laden trains toiling slowly and painfully up the steep incline, had often wondered if there was any danger from the showers of sparks which the engines so frequently threw up.

"I must apologize for my rather rough intrusion," he said with his sweet smile. "I heard your screams. You are Mrs. Fane, aren't you?"

She nodded, and there was admiration in the eyes that surveyed his well-knit figure.

"I won't start a conversation with you under these embarrassing circumstances," said Jim with a laugh, "but I'd like to say how sorry I am that you are so ill, Mrs. Fane. Could I send you some more books?"

"Thank you," she whispered. "You have done almost enough."

He heard the door close as the servant, unconscious that anything was wrong, came in, and heard her startled exclamation as she smelt the smoke. Coming out into the passage he met Madge Benson's astonished face.

A few words explained his presence and the woman hustled him to the door a little unceremoniously.

"Mrs. Fane is not allowed to see visitors, sir," she said. "She gets so excited."

"What is the matter with her?" asked Jim, rather amused at the unmistakable ejection.

"Paralysis in both legs," said Madge Benson, and Jim uttered an exclamation of pity.

"Don't think I'm not grateful to you, Mr. Steele," said the woman earnestly, "when I saw that smoke coming out into the passage my heart nearly stopped beating. That is the second accident we have had."

She was so anxious for him to be off that he made no attempt to continue talking.

So that was Mrs. Fane, thought Jim, as he strode along to his office. A singularly beautiful woman. The pity of it! She was still young and in the bloom of health save for this terrible affliction.

Jim had a big heart for suffering humanity and especially for women and children on whom the burden of sickness fell. He was half-way to the office when he remembered that Mrs. Fane had recognized him and called him by name! How could she have known him—she who had never left her sick room?

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“**M**R. GROAT will not be down to breakfast. He was working very late, miss.”

Eunice nodded. She preferred the conversation of Digby Groat to the veiled familiarity of his shrewd-faced servant. It would be difficult for her to define in what way Jackson offended her. Outwardly he was respect itself, and she could not recall any term or word he had employed to which she could reasonably take offense. It was the assurance of the man, his proprietorial attitude which irritated her. He reminded her of a boarding house at which she had once stayed, where the proprietor acted as butler, and endeavored, without success, to combine the deference of the servant, with the authority of the master.

“You were out very early this morning, miss,” said Jackson with his sly smile as he changed her plates.

“Is there any objection to my going out before breakfast?” asked Eunice, her anger rising.

“None at all, miss,” said the man blandly. “I hope I haven’t offended you, only I happened to see you coming back.”

She had been out to send the parcel and the letter to Jim, the nearest district messenger office being less than a quarter of a mile from Grosvenor Square. She opened her lips to speak and closed them again tightly. There was no reason in the world why she should excuse herself to the servant.

Jackson was not ready to take a rebuff and besides he had something important to communicate.

"You weren't disturbed last night, were you, miss?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" demanded Eunice looking up with a start.

His keen eyes were upon her and without any reason she felt guilty.

"Somebody was having a joke here last night, miss," he said, "and the governor is as wild as . . . well, he's mad!"

She put down her knife and fork and sat back in her chair.

"I don't quite understand you, Jackson," she said coldly. "What is the joke that somebody was having, and why do you ask me if I was disturbed? Did anything happen in the night?"

The man nodded.

"Somebody was in the house," he said, "and it is a wonder that Mr. Groat didn't hear it, because he was working in his laboratory. I thought perhaps you might have heard him searching the house afterwards."

She shook her head. Had the Blue Hand been detected, she wondered?

"How do you know that a stranger was in the house?" she asked.

"Because he left his mark," said the man grimly. "You know that white door leading to the laboratory, miss?"

She nodded.

"Well, when Mr. Groat came out about half-past two this morning he was going to turn out the hall lights when he saw a smudge of paint on the door. He

went back and found that it was the mark of a blue hand. I've been trying to get it off all the morning, but it is greasy and can't be cleaned."

"The mark of a blue hand?" she repeated slowly and felt herself change color. "What does that mean?"

"I'm blessed if I know," said Jackson shaking his head. "The governor doesn't know either. But there it was as plain as a pikestaff. I thought it was a servant who did it. There is one under notice and she might have been up to her tricks, but it couldn't have been her. Besides, the servants' sleeping rooms are at the back of the house and the door between the front and the back is kept locked."

So the mysterious visitor had not been satisfied with warning her. She had warned Digby Groat as well!

Eunice had nearly finished breakfast when Digby made his appearance. He was looking tired and haggard, she thought. He never looked his best in the early hours, but this morning he was more unprepossessing than usual. He shot a swift suspicious glance at the girl as he took his place at the table.

"You have finished, I'm afraid, Miss Weldon," he said briefly. "Has Jackson told you what happened in the night?"

"Yes," said Eunice quietly. "Have you any idea what it means?"

He shook his head.

"It means trouble to the person who did it, if I catch him," he said, then changing the conversation he asked how his mother was that morning.

Eunice invariably called at Mrs. Groat's room on her way down and she was able to tell him that his

mother was mending rapidly and had passed a very good night.

"She can't get well too soon," he said. "How did you sleep, Miss Weldon?"

"Very well," she prevaricated.

"Have you tried my chocolates?" he smiled.

She nodded.

"They are beautiful."

"Don't eat too many at once, they are rather rich," he said, and made no further reference either to that matter or to the midnight visitor.

Later in the morning when she was going about her work, Eunice saw workmen engaged on cleaning the canvas door. Apparently the blue stain could not be eradicated and after a consultation with Digby, the canvas was being painted a dull blue color.

She knew that Digby was perturbed more than ordinarily. When she had met him, as she had occasionally that morning, he had worn a furtive, hunted look and once, when she had gone into his study to bring to his notice an account which she had unearthed, he was muttering to himself.

That afternoon there was a reception at Lord Waltham's house in Park Lane, in honor of a colonial premier who was visiting England. Digby Groat found it convenient to cultivate the acquaintance of the æsthetic Lord Waltham who was one of the great financial five of the City of London. Digby had gone cleverly to work to form a small syndicate for the immediate purchase of the Danton estate. The time had not yet come when he could dispose of this property, but it was fast approaching.

There were many women in that brilliant assembly

who would have been glad to know a man reputedly clever, and certainly the heir to great wealth, but in an inverted sense Digby was a fastidious man. Society which met him and discussed him over their dinner-tables were puzzled by his avoidance of woman's society. He could have made a brilliant marriage had he so desired, but apparently the girls of his own set had no attraction for him: There were intimates, men about town who were less guarded in their language when they spoke across the table after the women had gone, and these told stories of him which did not redound to his credit. Digby in his youth had had many affairs; vulgar, sordid affairs which had left each victim with an aching heart and no redress.

He had only come to "look in" he explained. There was heavy work awaiting him at home, and he hinted at the new experiment he was making which would take up the greater part of the evening.

"How is your mother, Groat?" asked Lord Waltham.

"Thank you, sir, I think she is better," replied Digby.

He wanted to keep off the subject of his mother.

"I can't understand the extraordinary change that has come over her in late years," said Lord Waltham with a little frown. "She used to be so bright and cheerful, one of the wittiest women I have ever met. And then of a sudden, her spirits seemed to go and if you don't mind my saying so, she seemed to get old."

"I noticed that," said Digby with an air of profound concern, "but women of her age frequently go all to pieces in a week."

"I suppose there's something in that. I always forget you're a doctor," smiled Lord Waltham.

Digby took his leave and he, too, was chuckling



softly to himself as he went down the steps to his waiting car. He wondered what Lord Waltham would say if he had explained the secret of his mother's banished brightness. It was only by accident that he himself had made the discovery. She was a drug taker, as assiduous a "dope" as he had ever met in his professional career.

When he discovered this he had set himself to break down the habit. Not because he loved her, but because he was a scientist addicted to experiments. He had found the source of her supply and gradually had extracted a portion of the narcotic from every pellet until the drug had ceased to have effect.

The result from the old woman's point of view was deplorable. She suddenly seemed to wither and Digby, whom she had ruled until then with a rod of iron, had to his surprise found himself the master. It was a lesson of which he was not slow to take advantage. Every day and night she was watched and the drug was kept from her. With it she was a slave to her habit; without it she was a slave to Digby. He preferred the latter form of bondage.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Septimus Salter had not arrived when Jim had reached the office that morning and he waited, for he had a great deal to say to the old man, whom he had not seen for the better part of the week.

When he did come, a little gouty and therefore more than a little petulant, he was inclined to pooh-pooh the suggestion that there was anything in the sign of the Blue Hand.

"Whoever the person is, he or she must have had the stamp by them—you say it looks like a rubber

stamp—and used it fortuitously. No, I can't remember any Blue Hand in the business. If I were you I should not attach too much importance to this."

Although Jim did not share his employer's opinion he very wisely did not disagree.

"Now, what is this you were telling me about a will? You say Mrs. Groat has made a new will, subsequent to the one she executed in this office?"

Jim assented.

"And left all her money away from the boy, eh?" said old Mr. Salter thoughtfully. "Curiously enough, I have always had an idea that there was no love lost between that pair. To whom do you say the money was left?"

"To the Marquis of Estremeda."

"I know the name," nodded Mr. Salter. "He is a very rich grandee of Spain and was for some time an attaché at the Spanish Embassy. He may or may not have been a friend of the Dantons, I cannot recall. There is certainly no reason why she should leave her money to one who, unless my memory is at fault, owns half a province and has three or four great houses in Spain. Now, here you are up against a real mystery. Now what is your news?" he asked.

Jim had a little more to tell him.

"I am taking the chocolates to an analyst—a friend of mine," he said and Mr. Salter smiled.

"You don't expect to discover that they are poisoned, do you?" he asked drily. "You are not living in the days of Cæsar Borgia and with all his poisonous qualities I have never suspected Digby Groat of being a murderer."

"Nevertheless," said Jim, "I am leaving nothing to

chance. My own theory is that there is something wrong with those innocent-looking sweetmeats, and the mysterious Blue Hand knew what it was and came to warn the girl."

"Rubbish," growled the old lawyer. "Get along with you. I have wasted too much time on this infernal case."

Jim's first call was at a laboratory in Wigmore Street, and he explained to his friend just enough to excite his curiosity for further details, which, however, Jim was not prepared to give.

"What do you expect to find?" said the chemist, weighing two chocolates in his palm.

"I don't know exactly what I expect," said Jim. "But I shall be very much surprised if you do not discover something that should not be there."

The scientist dropped the chocolates in a big test tube, poured in a liquid from two bottles and began heating the tube over a Bunsen burner.

"Call this afternoon at three o'clock and I will give you all the grisly details," he said.

It was three o'clock when Jim returned, not expecting, it must be confessed, any startling results from the analysis. He was shown into the chemist's office, and there on the desk were three test tubes standing in a little wooden holder.

"Sit down, Steele," said Mendhlesohn. He was, as his name implied, a member of a great Jewish fraternity which has furnished so many brilliant geniuses to the world. "I can't quite make out this analysis," he said. "But, as you thought, there are certainly things in the chocolates which should not be there."

"Poison?" said Jim, aghast.

Mendhlesohn shook his head.

"Technically, yes," he admitted. "There is poison in almost everything, but I doubt whether the eating of a thousand of these would produce death. I found traces of bromide of potassium, and traces of hyoscin, and another drug which is distilled from *cannabis indica*."

"That is hashish, isn't it?"

Mendhlesohn nodded.

"When it is smoked it is called hashish; when it is distilled we have another name for it. These three drugs come, of course, into the category of poisons, and in combination, taken in large doses, they would produce unconsciousness and ultimately death, but there is not enough of the drug present in these sweets to bring about that alarming result."

"What result would it produce?" asked Jim.

"That is just what is puzzling me and my friend, Dr. Jakes," said Mendhlesohn rubbing his unshaven chin. "Jakes thinks that, administered in small continuous doses, the effect of this drug would be to destroy the will power, and, what for a better term I would describe in the German fashion, as the resistance-to-evil-power of the human mind. In England, as you probably know, when a nervous and highly excitable man is sentenced to death, it is the practice to place minute doses of bromide in everything he eats and drinks, in order to reduce him to such a low condition of mental resistance, that even the thought of an impending doom has no effect upon him."

Jim's face had gone suddenly pale, as the horror of the villainous plot dawned upon him.

"What effect would this have upon a high-spirited

girl, who was, let us say, being made love to by a man she disliked?"

The chemist shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose that eventually her dislike would develop into apathy and indifference. She would not completely forego her resistance to his attentions, but at the same time, that resistance would be more readily overcome. There are only two types of mind," he went on, "the 'dominant' and the 'recessive.' We call the 'dominant' that which is the more powerful and the 'recessive' that which is the less powerful. In this world it is possible for a little weak man to dominate a big and vigorous man, by what you would call the sheer force of his personality. The effect of this drug would ultimately be to turn a powerful mind into a weak mind. I hope I am not being too scientific," he smiled.

"I can follow you very well," said Jim quietly. "Now tell me this, Mendhlesohn, would it be possible to get a conviction against the person who supplied these sweets?"

Mendhlesohn shook his head.

"As I told you, the doses are in such minute quantities, that it is quite possible they may have got in by accident. I have only been able to find what we chemists call a 'trace' so far, but probably the doses would be increased from week to week. If in three weeks' time you bring me chocolates or other food that has been tampered with, I shall be able to give you a very exact analysis."

"Were all the chocolates I brought similarly treated?"

Mendhlesohn nodded.

"If they had been doped," he went on, "the doping has been very cleverly done. There is no discoloration of the interior and the drug must have been introduced by what we call saturation, which only a very skillful chemist or a doctor trained in chemistry would attempt."

Jim said nothing. Digby Groat was both a skilled chemist and a doctor trained in chemistry.

On leaving the laboratory he went for his favorite walk in Hyde Park. He wanted to be alone and think this matter out. He must act with the greatest caution, he thought. To warn the girl on such slender foundation was not expedient. He must wait until the dose had been increased, though that meant that she was to act as a bait for Digby Groat's destruction and he writhed at the thought. But she must not know; he was determined as to this.

That night he had arranged a pleasant little dinner, and he was looking forward eagerly to a meeting with one whose future absorbed his whole attention and thoughts. Even the search for Lady Mary Danton had receded into the background, and might have vanished altogether as a matter of interest, were it not for the fact that Digby Groat and his affairs were so inextricably mixed up with the mystery. Whilst Eunice Weldon was an inmate of the Groats' house, the Danton mystery would never be completely out of his thoughts.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JIM had never seen the girl in evening clothes, and he was smitten dumb by her ethereal beauty. She wore a simple dress of cream charmeuse, innocent of color, except for the touch of gold at her waist. She looked taller to Jim's eyes and the sweet dignity of her face was a benison which warmed and comforted his heart.

"Well," she asked as the cab was proceeding towards Piccadilly, "am I presentable?"

"You're wonderful!" breathed Jim.

He sat stiffly in the cab, scarcely daring to move lest the substance of this beautiful dream be touched by his irreverent hands. Her loveliness was unearthly and he, too, could adore, though from a different standpoint, the glorious promise of her womanhood, the delicious contours of her Madonna-like face. She was to him the spirit and embodiment of all that womanhood means. She was the truth of the dreams that men dream, the divine substance of shadowy figures that haunt their thoughts and dreams.

"Phew!" he said, "you almost frighten me, Eunice."

He heard her silvery laugh in the darkness.

"You're very silly, Jim," she said, slipping her arm into his.

Nevertheless, she experienced a thrill of triumph and happiness that she had impressed him so.

"I have millions of questions to ask you," she said

after they had been ushered to a corner of the big dining-room of the Ritz-Carlton. "Did you get my letter? And did you think I was mad to send you those chocolates? Of course, it was terribly unfair to Mr. Groat, but, really, Jim, you're turning me into a suspicious old lady!"

He laughed gently.

"I loved your letter," he said simply. "And as for the chocolates——" he hesitated.

"Well?"

"I should tell him that you enjoyed them thoroughly," he smiled.

"I have," said the girl ruefully. "I hate telling lies, even that kind of lie."

"And the next box you receive," Jim went on, "you must send me three or four of its contents."

She was alarmed now, looking at him, her red lips parted, her eyebrows crescents of inquiry.

"Was there anything wrong with them?" she asked.

He was in a dilemma. He could not tell her the result of the analysis, and at the same time he could not allow her to run any further into needless danger. He had to invent something on the spur of the moment and his excuse was lame and unconvincing.

Listening, she recognized their halting nature, but was sensible enough not to insist upon rigid explanations, and moreover, she wanted to discuss the hand and its startling appearance in the middle of the night.

"It sounds almost melodramatic," said Jim, but his voice was grave, "and I find a great difficulty in reconciling the happening to the realities of life. Of one thing I'm sure," he went on, "and it is that this strange woman, if woman it be, has a reason for her acts. The



mark of the hand is deliberately designed. That it is blue has a meaning, too, a meaning which apparently is not clear to Digby Groat. And now let us talk about ourselves," he smiled and his hand rested for a moment over hers.

She did not attempt to withdraw her own until the waiter came in sight, and then she drew it away so gently as to suggest reluctance.

"I'm going to stay another month with the Groats," she informed him, "and then if Mrs. Groat doesn't find some real work for me to do, I'm going back to the photographers—if they'll have me."

"I know somebody who wants you more than the photographer," he said quietly, "somebody whose heart just aches whenever you pass out of his sight."

She felt her own heart beating thunderously and the hand that he held under the cover of the table trembled.

"Who is that—somebody?" she asked faintly.

"Somebody who will not ask you to marry him until he can offer you an assured position," said Jim. "Somebody who loves the very ground you walk upon so much that he must have carpets for your dear feet and a mansion to house you more comfortably than the tiny attic overlooking the London, Midland and Scottish Railway."

She did not speak for a long time, and he thought he had offended her. The color came and went in her face, the soft rounded bosom rose and fell more quickly than was usual, and the hand that he held closed so tightly upon his fingers that they were almost numb when she suddenly released her hold.

"Jim," she said, still averting her eyes, "I could work very well on bare boards, and I should love to

watch the London, Midland and Scottish trains—go past your attic.”

She turned her head to his and he saw that her eyes were bright with tears.

“If you’re not very careful, Jim Steele,” she said, with an attempt at raillery, “I shall propose to you!”

“May I smoke?” said Jim huskily, and when she nodded and he lit his match, she saw the flame was quivering in his shaking hand.

She wondered what made him so quiet for the rest of the evening. She could not know that he was stunned and shaken by the great fortune that had come to him, that his heart was as numb with happiness as his fingers had been in the pressure of her hand.

When they drove back to the house that night she wanted him to take her in his arms in the darkness of the cab and crush her against his breast: she wanted to feel his kisses on her lips, her eyes. If he had asked her at that moment to run away with him, to commit the maddest folly, she would have consented joyously, for her love for the man was surging up like a bubbling stream of subterranean fire that had found its vent, overwhelming and burning all reason, all tradition.

Instead, he sat by her side, holding her hand and dreaming of the golden future which awaited him.

“Good-night, Jim,” her voice sounded cold and a little dispirited, as she put her gloved hand in his at the door of 409.

“Good-night,” he said in a low voice and kissed her hand.

She was nearly in tears when she went into her room.

and shut the door behind her. She walked to her dressing-table and looked in the glass, long and inquiringly, and then she shook her head.

"I wish he wasn't so good," she said, "or else more of a hero!"

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

JIM continued his journey to the flat, so enveloped in the rosy clouds which had descended upon him, that he was unconscious of time or space, and it seemed that he had only stepped into the cab when it jerked to a halt before the portals of Featherdale Mansions. He might have continued in his dream without interruption had not the cabman, with some asperity, called him back to remind him that he had not paid his fare.

That brought him back to the earth.

As he was about to open the outer door of the flats (it was closed at eleven every night) the door opened of its own accord and he stepped back to allow a lady to pass. She was dressed from head to foot in black and she passed him without a word, he staring after her as she walked with quick steps to a motor-car that he had noticed drawn up a few yards from where his cab had stopped. Who was she, he wondered as the car passed out of sight.

He dismissed her from his thoughts, for the glamour of the evening was not yet passed and for an hour he sat in his big chair, staring into vacancy and recalling every incident of that precious evening. He could not believe it was true that this half-divine being was to be his, and then with a deep sigh he aroused himself to a sense of reality.

There was work to be done, he thought, as he rose

to his feet, and it was work for her. His income was a small one, and must be considerably augmented before he dare ask this beautiful lady to share his lot.

He glanced idly at the table. That afternoon he had been writing up his notes of the case and the book was still where he had left it, only——

He could have sworn he had left it open. He had a remarkable memory for little things, tiny details of placements and position, and he was sure the book had not only been closed, but that its position had been changed.

A woman came in the mornings to clean the flat and make his bed and invariably he let her in himself. She usually arrived when he was making his own breakfast—another fad of his. She had no key and under any circumstances never came at night.

He opened the book and almost jumped.

Between the pages marking the place where he had been writing was a key of a peculiar design. Attached to the handle was a tiny label on which was written: "D. G.'s master key."

This time there was no sign of the Blue Hand, but he recognized the writing. It was the same which had appeared on the warning card which the girl had received.

The woman in black had been to his flat—and had left him the means to enter Digby Groat's premises!

"Phew!" whistled Jim in amazement.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EUNICE woke in the morning with a queer little sense of disappointment. It was not until she was thoroughly awake, sitting up in bed and sipping the fragrant tea which the maid had brought her, that she analyzed the cause. Then she laughed at herself.

"Eunice Weldon," she said shaking her head sadly, "you're a bold woman! Because the best man in the world was too good, too silly, or too frightened to kiss you, you are working up a grievance. In the first place, Eunice Weldon, you shouldn't have proposed to a man. It was unladylike and certain to lead to your feeling cheap. You should have been content to wait for the beautiful carpet under your feet and the mansion over your head, and should have despised the bare boards of an attic overlooking the railway. I don't suppose they are bare boards, Eunice," she mused. "They are certain to be very nicely covered and there will be all sorts of mementos of Jim's campaigns hanging on the walls or tucked away in odd little cupboards. And I'm sure when the trains are not rattling past, that the view from the window is beautiful, and anyway, I shouldn't have time to look out of the window. There would be Jim's shirts to mend, Jim's socks to darn, and—Eunice Weldon, get up!" she said hurriedly as she slipped out of bed.

Going along the corridor Digby Groat heard the

sound of her fresh young voice singing in the bathroom and he smiled.

The ripe beauty of the girl had come on him with a rush. She was no longer desirable, she was necessary. He had intended to make her his plaything, he was as determined now that she should be his decoration. He laughed aloud at the little conceit! A decoration! Something that would enhance him in the eyes of his fellows. Even marriage would be a small price to pay for the possession of that jewel.

Jackson saw him smiling as he came down the stairs.

"Another box of chocolates has arrived, sir," he said in a low voice, as though he were imparting a shameful secret.

"Throw them in the ashpit, or give them to my mother," said Digby carelessly and Jackson stared at him.

"Aren't you——" he began.

"Don't ask so many questions, Jackson." Digby turned his glittering eyes upon his servant and there was an ugly look in his face. "You are getting just a little too interested in things, my friend. And whilst we are on this matter, let me say, Jackson, that when you speak to Miss Weldon I want you to take that damned grin off your face and talk as a servant to a lady; do you understand that?"

"I'm no servant," said the man sullenly.

"That is the part you are playing now, so play it," said Digby, "and don't sulk with me, or——"

His hand went up to a rack hanging on the wall where reposed a collection of hunting crops, and his fingers closed over the nearest.

The man started back.

"I didn't mean anything," he whined, his face livid. "I've tried to be respectful——"

"Get my letters," said Digby curtly, "and bring them into the dining-room."

Eunice came into the room at that moment.

"Good morning, Miss Weldon," said Digby pulling out her chair from the table. "Did you have a nice dinner?"

"Oh, splendid," she said, and then changed the conversation.

She was dreading the possibility of his turning the conversation to the previous night, and was glad when the meal was finished.

Digby's attitude, however, was most correct. He spoke of general topics, and did not touch upon her outing, and when she went to Mrs. Groat's room to play at work, for it was only playing, the real work had been done, he did not, as she feared he might, follow her.

Digby waited until the doctor called, and waylaying him in the passage learned that his mother had completely recovered, and though a recurrence of the stroke was possible, it was not immediately likely. He had a few words to say to her that morning.

Old Mrs. Groat sat by the window in a wheeled chair, a huddled, unlovely figure; her dark gloomy eyes surveyed without interest the stately square with its green centerpiece. The change of seasons had for her no other significance than a change of clothing. The wild heart which once leapt to the call of spring, beat feebly in a body in which passion had burnt itself to bitter ashes. And yet the gnarled hands, crossing and re-crossing each other on her lap had



once touched and blessed as they had touched and blasted.

Once or twice her mind went to this new girl, Eunice Weldon. There was no ray of pity in her thought. If Digby wanted the girl he would take her, and her fate interested old Jane Groat no more than the fate of the fly that buzzed upon the window, and whom a flick of her handkerchief presently swept from existence. There was more reason why the girl should go if . . . she frowned. The scar on the wrist was much bigger than a sixpence. It was probably a coincidence.

She hoped that Digby would concentrate on his new quest and leave her alone. She was mortally afraid of him, fearing in her own heart the length to which he would go to have his will. She knew that her life would be snuffed out, like the flame of a candle, if it were expedient for Digby to remove her. When she had recovered consciousness and found herself in charge of a nurse, her first thought had been of wonder that Digby had allowed her to revive. He knew nothing of the will, she thought, and a twisted smile broke upon her lined face. There was a surprise in store for him. She would not be there to see it, that was the pity. But she could gloat in anticipation over his chagrin and his impotent rage.

The handle of the door turned and there followed a whispered conversation. Presently the door closed again.

"How are you this morning, mother?" said the pleasant voice of Digby, and she blinked round at him in a flutter of agitation.

"Very well, my boy, very well," she said tremu-

lously. "Won't you sit down?" She glanced nervously about for the nurse, but the woman had gone. "Will you tell the nurse I want her, my boy?" she began.

"The nurse can wait," said her dutiful son coolly. "There are one or two things I want to talk to you about before she returns. But principally I want to know why you left me with a beggarly twenty-thousand pounds to face the world?"

She nearly collapsed with the shock.

"A will, my boy?" She whined the words. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"The will which you made and put into that secret drawer of your cabinet," he said patiently, "and don't tell me that I'm dreaming, or that you did it for a joke, or that it was an act of mental aberration on your part. Tell me the truth!"

"It was a will I made years ago, my dear," she quavered. "When I thought twenty-thousand pounds was all the money I possessed."

"You're a liar," said Digby without heat. "And a stupid old liar. You made that will to spite me, you old devil!"

She was staring at him in horror.

Digby was most dangerous when he talked in that cool, even tone of his.

"I have destroyed the precious document," said Digby Groat in the same conversational voice, "and when you see Miss Weldon, who witnessed its destruction, I would be glad if you would tell her, that the will she saw consumed was one which you made when you were not quite right in your head."

Mrs. Groat was incapable of speech. Her chin

trembled convulsively and her only thought was how she could attract the attention of the nurse.

"Put my chair back against the bed, Digby," she said faintly. "The light is too strong."

He hesitated, but did as she asked, then seeing her hand close upon the bell-push which hung by the side of the bed, he laughed.

"You need not be afraid, mother," he said contemptuously, "I did not intend taking any other action than I have already taken. Remember that your infernal nurse will not be here all the time, and do as I ask you. I will send Miss Weldon up to you in a few minutes on the excuse of taking instructions from you and answering some letters which came for you this morning. Do you understand?"

She nodded and at that moment the nurse came in.

Summoned to the sick-room, Eunice found her employer looking more feeble than she had appeared before she was stricken down. The old woman's eyes smoldered their hate, as the girl came into the room. She guessed it was Eunice who had discovered the will and loathed her, but fear was the greater in her, and after the few letters had been formally answered, Mrs. Groat stopped the girl, who was in the act of rising.

"Sit down again, Miss Weldon," she said. "I wanted to tell you about a will of mine that you found. I'm very glad you discovered it. I had forgotten that I had made it."

Every word was strained and hateful to utter.

"You see, my dear young woman, I sometimes suffer from a curious lapse of memory, and—and—that will was made when I was suffering from an attack——"

Eunice listened to the halting words and was under the impression that the hesitation was due to the old woman's weakness.

"I quite understand, Mrs. Groat," she said sympathetically. "Your son told me."

"He told you, did he?" said Jane Groat returning to her contemplation of the window, then; when Eunice was waiting for her dismissal, "Are you a great friend of my son's?"

Eunice smiled.

"No, not a great friend, Mrs. Groat," she said.

"You will be," said the woman, "greater than you imagine," and there was such malignity in the tone that the girl shuddered.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

JIM loved London, the noise and the smell of it. He loved its gentle thunders, its ineradicable good humor, its sublime muddle. Paris depressed him, with its air of gayety and the underlying fierceness of life's struggle. There was no rest in the soul of Paris. It was a city of strenuous bargaining, of ruthless exploitation. Brussels was a dumpy, undergrown Paris, Berlin, a stucco Gomorrah, Madrid, an extinct crater beneath which a new volcanic stream was seeking a vent.

New York he loved, a city of steel and concrete teeming with sentimentalists posing as tyrants. There was nothing quite like New York in the world. Dante in his most prodigal mood might have dreamt New York and da Vinci might have planned it, but only the high gods could have materialized the dream or built to the master's plan. But London was London—incomparable, beautiful. It was the history of the world and the mark of civilization. He made a detour and passed through Covent Garden.

The blazing color and fragrance of it! Jim could have lingered all the morning in the draughty halls, but he was due at the office to meet Mr. Salter.

Almost the first question that the lawyer asked him was:

"Have you investigated Selengers?"

The identity of the mysterious Selengers had been forgotten for the moment, Jim admitted.

"You ought to know who they are," said the lawyer. "You will probably discover that Groat or his mother are behind them. The fact that the offices were once the property of Danton rather supports this idea—though theories are an abomination to me!"

Jim agreed.

There were so many issues to the case that he had almost lost sight of his main object.

"The more I think of it," he confessed, "the more useless my search seems to me, Mr. Salter. If I find Lady Mary, you say that I shall be no nearer to frustrating the Groats?"

Mr. Septimus Salter did not immediately reply. He had said as much, but subsequently had amended his point of view. Theories, as he had so emphatically stated, were abominable alternatives to facts and yet he could not get out of his head that if the theory he had formed to account for Lady Mary Danton's obliteration were substantiated, a big step would have been taken toward clearing up a host of minor mysteries.

"Go ahead with Selengers," he said at last. "Possibly you may find that their enquiries are made as much to find Lady Mary as to establish the identity of your young friend. At any rate, you can't be doing much harm."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

**A**T twelve o'clock that night Eunice heard a car draw up in front of the house. She had not yet retired, and she stepped out on to the balcony as Digby Groat ascended the steps.

Eunice closed the door and pulled the curtains across. She was not tired enough to go to bed. She had very foolishly succumbed to the temptation to take a doze that afternoon, and to occupy her time she had brought up the last bundle of accounts, unearthed from a box in the wine-cellar, and had spent the evening tabulating them.

She finished the last account, and fixing a rubber band round them, rose and stretched herself, and then she heard a sound; a stealthy foot upon the stone of the balcony floor. There was no mistaking it. She had never heard it before on the occasion of the earlier visits. She switched out the light, drew back the curtains noiselessly and softly unlocked the French window. She listened. There it was again. She felt no fear, only the thrill of impending discovery. Suddenly she jerked open the window and stepped out, and for a time saw nothing, then as her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she saw something crouching against the wall.

"Who is that?" she cried.

There was no reply for a little time; then the voice said:

"I am awfully sorry to have frightened you, Eunice." It was Jim Steele.

"Jim!" she gasped incredulously, and then a wave of anger swept over her. So it had been Jim all the time and not a woman! Jim, who had been supporting his prejudices by these contemptible tricks. Her anger was unreasonable, but it was very real and born of the shock of disillusionment. She remembered in a flash how sympathetic Jim had been when she told him of the midnight visitor and how he had pretended to be puzzled. So he was fooling her all the time. It was hateful of him!

"I think you had better go," she said coldly.

"Let me explain, Eunice."

"I don't think any explanation is necessary," she said. "Really Jim, it is despicable of you."

She went back to her room with wildly beating heart. She could have wept for vexation. Jim! He was the mysterious blue hand, she thought indignantly, and he had made a laughing stock of her! Probably he was the writer of the letters, too, and had been in her room that night. She stamped her foot in her anger. She hated him for deceiving her. She hated him for shattering the idol she had set up in her heart. She had never felt so unutterably miserable as she was when she flung herself on her bed and wept until she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

"Damn!" muttered Jim as he slipped out of the house and strode in search of his muddy little car. An unprofitable evening had ended tragically.

"Bungling, heavy-footed jackass," he growled savagely as he spun perilously round a corner and



nearly into a taxi-cab which had ventured to the wrong side of the road. But he was not cursing the cab-driver. It was his own stupidity which had led him to test the key which had made a remarkable appearance on his table the night before. He had gone on to the balcony, merely to examine the fastenings of the girl's window, with the idea of judging her security.

He felt miserable and would have been glad to talk his trouble over with somebody. But there was nobody he could think of, nobody whom he liked well enough, unless it was—Mrs. Fane. He half smiled at the thought and wondered what that invalid lady would think of him if he knocked her up at this hour to pour his woes into her sympathetic ears! The sweet, sad-faced woman had made a very deep impression upon him, he was surprised to find how often she came into his thoughts.

Half-way up Baker Street he brought his car to a walking pace and turned. He had remembered Selengers, and it had just occurred to him that at this hour he was more likely to profit by a visit than by a day-time call. It was nearly two o'clock when he stopped in Brade Street and descended.

He remembered the janitor had told him that there was a side entrance, which was used alone by Selengers. He found the narrow court which led to the back of the building, and after a little search discovered what was evidently the door which would bring him through the courtyard to the back of Brade Street Buildings. He tried the door and to his surprise it was unlocked. Hearing the soft pad of the policeman's feet in the street, and not wishing to be discovered trying strange

doors at that hour, he passed through and closed it behind him, waiting till the officer had passed before he continued his investigations.

In preparation for such a contingency he had brought with him a small electric lamp, and with the aid of this he found his way across the paved yard to a door which opened into the building. This was locked, he discovered to his dismay. There must be another, he thought, and began looking for it. There were windows overlooking the courtyard, but these were so carefully shuttered that it was impossible to tell whether lights shone behind them or not.

He found the other entrance at an angle of two walls, tried it, and to his delight it opened. He was in a short stone corridor and at the farther end was a barred gate. Short of this and to the right was a green door. He turned the handle softly and as it opened he saw that a brilliant light was burning within. He pushed it further and stepped into the room.

He was in an office which was unfurnished except for a table and a chair, but it was not the desolate appearance of the apartment which held his eye.

As he had entered a woman, dressed from head to foot in black, was passing to a second room, and at the sound of the door she turned quickly and drew her veil over her face. But she had delayed that action a little too long, and Jim, with a gasp of amazement, had looked upon the face of that "incurable invalid," Mrs. Fane!

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

“**W**HO are you, and what do you want?” she asked. He saw her hand drop to the fold of her dress, then: “Mr. Steele,” she said as she recognized him.

“I’m sorry to disturb you,” said Jim as he closed the door behind him, “but I wanted to see you pretty badly.”

“Sit down, Mr. Steele. Did you see my——” she hesitated, “see my face?”

He nodded gravely.

“And did you recognize me?”

He nodded again.

“Yes, you are Mrs. Fane,” he said quietly.

Slowly her hands rose and she unpinned the veil.

“You may lock the door,” she said, “yes, I am Mrs. Fane.”

He was so bewildered, despite his seeming self-possession, that he had nothing to say.

“You probably think I have been practicing a wicked and mean deception,” she said, “but there are reasons—excellent reasons—why I should not be abroad in the daytime, and why, if I were traced to Featherdale Mansions, I should not be identified with the woman who walks at night.”

“Then it was you who left the key?” he said.

She nodded, and all the time her eyes never left his face.

"I am afraid I cannot enlighten you any farther," she said, "partly because I am not prepared at this moment to reveal my hand and partly because there is so little that I could reveal if I did."

And only a few minutes before he had been thinking how jolly it would be if he could lay all his troubles and perplexities before her. It was incredible that he should be talking with her at this midnight hour in a prosaic city office. He looked at the delicate white hand which rested against her breast and smiled, and she with her quick perceptions guessed the cause of his amusement.

"You are thinking of the Blue Hand?" she said quickly.

"Yes, I am thinking of the Blue Hand," said Jim.

"You have an idea that that is just a piece of chicanery and that the hand has no significance?" she asked quietly.

"Curiously enough I don't think that," said Jim. "I believe that symbol is a very interesting story, but you must tell it in your own time, Mrs. Fane."

She paced the room deep in thought, her hands clasped before her, her chin on her breast, and he waited, wondering how this strange discovery would develop.

"You came because you heard from South Africa that I had been making inquiries about the girl—she is not in danger?"

"No," said Jim with a wry face. "At present I am in danger of having offended her beyond pardon."

She looked at him sharply, but did not ask for an explanation.

"If you had thought my warnings were theatrical and meaningless, I should not have blamed you," she said after a while, "but I had to reach her in some way that would impress her."

"There is something I cannot understand, Mrs. Fane," said Jim. "Suppose Eunice had told Digby Groat of this warning?"

She smiled.

"He knows," she said quietly, and Jim remembered the hand on the laboratory door. "No, he is not the person who will understand what it all means," she said. "As to your Eunice," her lips parted in a dazzling little smile, "I would not like any harm to come to the child."

"Have you any special reason for wishing to protect her?" asked Jim.

She shook her head.

"I thought I had a month ago," she said. "I thought she was somebody whom I was seeking. A chance resemblance, fleeting and elusive, brought me to her; she was one of the shadows I pursued," she said with a bitter little smile, "one of the ghosts that led nowhere. She interested me. Her beauty, her fresh innocence and her character have fascinated me, even though she has ceased to be the real object of my search. And you, Mr. Steele. She interests you, too?" She eyed him keenly.

"Yes," said Jim, "she interests me, too."

"Do you love her?"

The question was so unexpected that Jim for once was not prepared with an answer. He was a reticent man ordinarily, and now that the opportunity pre-

sented he could not discuss the state of his feelings towards Eunice.

"If you do not really love her," said the woman, "do not hurt her, Mr. Steele. She is a very young girl, too good to be the passing amusement that Digby Groat intends she shall be."

"Does he?" said Jim between his teeth.

She nodded.

"There is a great future for you, and I hope that you will not ruin that career by an infatuation which has the appearance at the moment of being love."

He looked at the flushed and animated face and thought that next to Eunice she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"I am almost at the end of my pursuit," she went on, "and once we can bring Digby Groat and his mother to book, my work will be done." She shook her head sadly. "I have no further hope, no further hope," she said.

"Hope of what?" asked Jim.

"Finding what I sought," said Mrs. Fane, and her luminous eyes were fixed on his. "But I was mad, I sought that which is beyond recall and I must use the remaining years of my life for such happiness as God will send to me. Forty-three years of waste!" she threw out her arms with passionate gesture. "Forty-three years of suffering. A loveless childhood, a loveless marriage, a bitter betrayal. I have lost everything, Mr. Steele, everything. Husband and child and hope."

Jim started back.

"Good God!" he said, "then you are——"

"I am Lady Mary Danton." She looked at him strangely. "I thought you had guessed that."

Lady Mary Danton!

Then his search was ended, thought Jim with dismay. A queer, unsatisfactory ending, which brought him no nearer to reward or advancement, both of which were so vitally necessary now.

"You look disappointed," she said, "and yet you had set yourself out to find Lady Mary."

He nodded.

"And you have found her. Is she less attractive than you had imagined?"

He did not reply. He could not tell her that his real search had not been for her, but for her dead child.

"Do you know I have been seeing you every day for months, Mr. Steele?" she asked. "I have sat by your side in railway trains, in tube trains, and even stood by your side in tube lifts," she said with the ghost of a smile. "I have watched you and studied you and I have liked you."

She said the last words deliberately and her beautiful hand rested for a second on his shoulder.

"Search your heart about Eunice," she said, "and if you find that you are mistaken in your sentiments, remember that there is a great deal of happiness to be found in this world."

There was no mistaking her meaning.

"I love Eunice," said Jim quietly, and the hand that rested on his shoulder was withdrawn, "I love her as I shall never love any other woman in life. She is the beginning and end of my dreams." He did not

look up at the woman, but he could hear her quick breathing.

Presently she said in a low voice:

"I was afraid so—I was afraid so."

And then Jim, whose moral courage was beyond question, rose and faced her.

"Lady Mary," he said quietly, "you have abandoned hope that you will ever find your daughter?"

She nodded.

"Suppose Eunice were your daughter? Would you give her to me?"

She raised her eyes to his.

"I would give her to you with thankfulness," she said, "for you are the one man in the world whom I would desire any girl I love to marry," she shook her head. "But you, too, are pursuing shadows," she said. "Eunice is not my daughter—I have traced her parentage and there is no doubt at all upon the matter. She is the daughter of a South African musician."

"Have you seen the scar on her wrist?" he asked slowly. It was his last hope of identification and when she shook her head, his heart sank.

"I did not know that she had a scar on her wrist. What kind of a scar is it?" she asked.

"A small round burn the size of a sixpence," said Jim.

"My baby had no such mark—she had no blemish whatever."

"Nothing that would have induced some evilly disposed person to remove?"

Lady Mary shook her head.

"Oh, no," she said faintly. "You are chasing shadows, Mr. Steele, almost as persistently as I have



done. Now let me tell you something about myself," she said, "and I warn you that I am not going to elucidate the mystery of my disappearance—that can wait. This building is mine," she said. "I am the proprietor of the whole block. My husband bought it and in a moment of unexampled generosity presented it to me the day after its purchase. In fact, it was mine when it was supposed to be his. He was not a generous man," she said sadly, "but I will not speak of his treatment of me. This property has provided me with an income ample for my needs and I have, too, a fortune which I inherited from my father. We were desperately poor when I married Mr. Danton," she explained, "and only a week or two later my father's cousin, Lord Pethingham, died, and father inherited a very large sum of money, the greater portion of which came to me."

"Who is Madge Benson?" he demanded.

"Need you ask that?" she said. "She is my servant."

"Why did she go to prison?"

He saw the woman's lips close tight.

"You must promise not to ask questions about the past until I am ready to tell you, Mr. Steele," she said, "and now I think you can see me home." She looked round the office. "There are usually a dozen cablegrams to be seen and answered. A confidential clerk of mine comes in the morning to attend to the dispatch of wires which I leave for him. I have made myself a nuisance to every town clerk in the world, from Buenos Ayres to Shanghai," she said with a whimsical laugh in which there was a note of pain. "'The shadow he pursueth——' You know the old Biblical

lines, Mr. Steele, and I am so tired of my pursuit, so very tired!"

"And is it ended now?" asked Jim.

"Not yet," said Lady Mary and suddenly her voice grew hard and determined. "No, we've still got a lot of work before us, Jim——" She used the word shyly and laughed like a child when she saw him color. "Even Eunice will not mind my calling you Jim," she said, "and it is such a nice name, easily remembered, and it has the advantage of not being a popular nickname for dogs and cats."

He was dying to ask her why, if she was so well off, she had taken up her residence in a little flat overlooking a railway line, and it was probable that had he asked her, he would have received an unsatisfactory reply.

He took leave of her at her door.

"Good-night, neighbor," he smiled.

"Good-night, Jim," she said softly.

And Jim was still sitting in his big armchair pondering the events of the night when the first rays of the rising sun made a golden pattern upon the blind.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

EARLY the next morning a district messenger arrived at the flat with a letter from Eunice and he groaned before he opened it.

She had written it in the hurt of her discovery and there were phrases which made him wince.

"I never dreamt it was you, and after all the pretence you made that this Blue Hand was a woman! It wasn't fair of you, Jim. To secure a sensation you nearly frightened me to death on my first night here, and made me look ridiculous in order that I might fall into your waiting arms! I see it all now. You do not like Mr. Groat, and were determined that I should leave his house, and this is the method which you have followed. I shall find it very hard to forgive you and perhaps you had better not see me again until you hear from me."

"Oh, damn," said Jim for the fortieth time since he had left her.

What could he do? He wrote half-a-dozen letters and tore them all up, every one of them into shreds. He could not explain to her how the key came into his possession without betraying Lady Mary Danton's secret. And now he would find it more difficult than ever to convince her that Digby Groat was an unscrupulous villain. The position was hopeless and he groaned again. Then a thought struck him and he crossed the landing to the next flat.

Madge Benson opened the door and this time regarded him a little more favorably.

"M'lady is asleep," she said. She knew that Jim was aware of Mrs. Fane's identity.

"Do you think you could wake her? It is rather important."

"I will see," said Madge Benson and disappeared into the bedroom. She returned in a few moments. "Madame is awake. She heard your knock," she said. "Will you go in?"

Lady Mary was lying on the bed fully dressed, wrapped in a dressing-gown and she took the letter from Jim's hand which he handed her without a word, and read.

"Have patience," she said as she handed it back. "She will understand in time."

"And in the meanwhile," said Jim, his heart heavy, "anything can happen to her! This is the very thing I didn't want to occur."

"You went to the house. Did you discover anything?"

He shook his head.

"Take no notice and do not worry," said Lady Mary settling down in the bed and closing her eyes, "and now please let me sleep, Mr. Steele—I have not been to bed for twenty-four hours."

Eunice had not dispatched the messenger with the letter to Jim five minutes before she regretted the impulse which had made her write it. She had said bitter things which she did not really feel. It was an escapade of his which ought to be forgiven, because at the back of it, she thought, was his love for her. She

had further reason to doubt her wisdom, when, going to Digby Groat's library she found him studying a large photograph.

"That is very good, considering it was taken in artificial light," he said. It was an enlarged photograph of his laboratory door bearing the blue imprint, and so carefully had the photographer done his work, that every line and whorl of the finger-tips showed.

"It is a woman's hand, of course," he said.

"A woman," she gasped. "Are you sure?"

He looked up in surprise.

"Of course I'm sure," said Digby, "look at the size of it. It is much too small for a man."

So she had wronged Jim cruelly! And yet what was he doing there in the house? How had he got in? The whole thing was so inexplicable that she gave it up, only—she must tell Jim and ask him to forgive her.

As soon as she was free she went to the telephone. Jim was not in the office.

"Who is it speaking?" asked the voice of the clerk.

"Never mind," said the girl hurriedly and hung up the receiver.

All day long she was haunted by the thought of the injustice she had done the man she loved. He would send her a note, she thought, or would call her up, and at every ring of the telephone, the blood came into her face, only to recede when she heard the answer, and discovered the caller was some person in whom she had no interest.

That day was one of the longest she had ever spent in her life. There was practically no work to do, and even the dubious entertainment of Digby was denied

her. He went out in the morning and did not come back until late in the afternoon, going out again as soon as he had changed his clothes.

She ate her dinner in solitude and was comforted by the thought that she would soon be free from this employment. She had written to her old employer and he had answered by return of post, saying how glad he would be if he could get her back. Then they could have their little tea-parties all over again, she thought, and Jim, free of this obsession about Digby Groat, would be his old cheerful self.

The nurse was going out that evening and Mrs. Groat sent for her. She hated the girl, but she hated the thought of being alone much more.

"I want you to sit here with me until the nurse comes home," she said. "You can take a book and read, but don't fidget."

Eunice smiled to herself and went in search of a book.

She came back in time to find Mrs. Groat hiding something beneath her pillow. They sat in silence for an hour, the old woman playing with her hands on her lap, her head sunk forward, deep in thought, the girl trying to read, and finding it very difficult. Jim's face so constantly came between her and the printed page that she would have been glad for an excuse to put down the book, glad for any diversion.

It was Mrs. Groat who provided her with an escape from her ennui.

"Where did you get that scar on your wrist?" she asked, looking up.

"I don't know," said Eunice. "I have had it ever since I was a baby. I think I must have been burnt."

There was another long silence.

"Where were you born?"

"In South Africa," said the girl.

Again there was an interval, broken only by the creak of Mrs. Groat's chair.

In sheer desperation, for the situation was getting on her nerves, Eunice said:

"I found an old miniature of yours the other day, Mrs. Groat."

The woman fixed her with her dark eyes.

"Of me?" she said, and then, "oh, yes, I remember. Well? Did you think it looks like me?" she asked sourly.

"I think it was probably like you years ago. I could trace a resemblance," said Eunice diplomatically.

The answer seemed to amuse Jane Groat. She had a mordant sense of humor, the girl was to discover.

"Like me when I was like that, eh?" she said. "Do you think I was pretty?"

Here Eunice could speak whole-heartedly and without evasion.

"I think you were very beautiful," she said warmly.

"I was, too," said the woman speaking half to herself. "My father tried to bury me in a dead-and-alive village. He thought I was too attractive for town. A wicked, heartless brute of a man," she said, and the girl was somewhat shocked.

Apparently the old doctrine of filial piety did not run in Jane Groat's family.

"When I was a girl," the old woman went on, "the head of the family was the family tyrant, and lived for the exercise of his power. My father hated me from

the moment I was born and I hated him from the moment I began to think."

Eunice said nothing. She had not invited the confidence, nevertheless it fascinated her to hear this woman draw aside the veil which hid the past. What great tragedy had happened, she speculated, that had turned the beautiful original of the miniature into this hard and evil-looking woman?

"Men would run after me, Miss Weldon," she said with a curious complacency. "Men whose names are famous throughout the world."

The girl remembered the Marquis of Estremeda and wondered whether her generosity to him was due to the part he had played as a pursuing lover.

"There was one man who loved me," said the old woman reflectively, "but he didn't love me well enough. He must have heard something, I suppose, because he was going to marry me and then he broke it off and married a simpering fool of a girl from Malaga."

She chuckled to herself. She had had no intention of discussing her private affairs with Eunice Weldon, but something had started her on a train of reminiscence. Besides, she regarded Eunice already as an unofficial member of the family. Digby would tell her sooner or later. She might as well know from her, she thought.

"He was a Marquis," she went on, "a hard man, too, and he treated me badly. My father never forgave me after I came back, and never spoke another word in his life, although he lived for nearly twenty years."

After she had come back, thought Eunice. Then she had gone away with this Marquis? The Marquis



of Estremeda. And then he had deserted her, and had married this "simpering fool" from Malaga. Gradually the story was revealing itself before her eyes.

"What happened to the girl?" she asked gently. She was almost afraid to speak unless she stopped the loquacious woman.

"She died," said Mrs. Groat with a thin smile. "He said I killed her. I only told her the truth. Besides, I owed him something," she frowned, "I wish I hadn't," she muttered, "I wish I hadn't. Sometimes the ghost of her comes into this room and looks down at me with her deep black eyes and tells me that I killed her!" She mumbled something and again with that note of complacency in her voice: "When she heard that my child was the son——" she stopped quickly and looked round. "What am I talking about?" she said gruffly.

Eunice held her breath. Now she knew the secret of this strange household! Jim had told her something about it; told her of the little shipping clerk who had married Mrs. Groat, and for whom she had so profound a contempt. A shipping clerk from the old man's office, whom he had paid to marry the girl that her shame should be hidden.

Digby Groat was actually the son of—the Marquis of Estremeda! In law he was not even the heir to the Danton millions!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

EUNICE could only stare at the old woman. "Get on with your book," grumbled Mrs. Groat pettishly, and the girl, looking up through her lashes, saw the suspicious eyes fixed on her and the tremulous mouth moving as though she were speaking.

She must tell Jim. Despite her sense of loyalty, she realized that this was imperative. Jim was vitally interested in the disposal of the Danton estate, and he must know.

Suddenly the old woman began speaking again.

"What did I tell you just now?" she asked.

"You were talking about your youth," said the girl.

"Did I say anything about—a man?" asked the old woman suspiciously. She had forgotten! Eunice forced the lie to her lips.

"No," she replied, so loudly that anybody but this muddled woman would have known she was not speaking the truth.

"Be careful of my son," said Mrs. Groat after a while. "Don't cross him. He's not a bad lad, not a bad lad," she shook her head and glanced slyly at the girl. "He is like his father in many ways."

"Mr. Groat?" said Eunice and felt inexpressively mean at taking advantage of the woman's infirmity, but she steeled her heart with the thought that Jim must benefit by her knowledge.

"Groat," sneered the old woman contemptuously, "that worm. No—yes, of course he was Groat, who else could he be; who else?" she asked, her voice rising wrathfully.

There was a sound outside and she turned her head and listened.

"You won't leave me alone, Miss Weldon, until the nurse comes back, will you?" she whispered with pathetic eagerness. "You promise me that?"

"Why, of course, I promise you," said Eunice smiling, "that is why I am here, to keep you company."

The door handle turned, and the old woman watched it, fascinated. Eunice heard her audible gasp as Digby came in. He was in evening dress and smoking a cigarette through a long holder.

He seemed for the moment taken aback by the sight of Eunice and then smiled.

"Of course, it is the nurse's night out, isn't it? How are you feeling to-night, mother?"

"Very well, my boy," she quavered, "very well indeed. Miss Weldon is keeping me company."

"Splendid," said Digby. "I hope Miss Weldon hasn't been making your flesh creep."

"Oh, no," said the girl, shocked, "of course I haven't. How could I?"

"I was wondering whether you had been telling mother of our mysterious visitor," he laughed as he pulled up an easy chair and sat down. "You don't mind my smoke, mother, do you?"

Eunice thought that even if old Jane Groat had objected, it would not have made the slightest difference to her son, but the old woman shook her head and again turned her pleading eyes on Eunice.

"I should like to catch that lady," said Digby watching a curl of smoke rise to the ceiling.

"What lady, my boy?" asked Mrs. Groat.

"The lady who has been wandering loose round this house at night, leaving her mark upon the panels of my door."

"A burglar," said the old woman and did not seem greatly alarmed.

Digby shook his head.

"A woman and a criminal, I understand. She left a clear finger-print and Scotland Yard have had the photograph and have identified it with that of a woman who served a sentence in Holloway Gaol."

A slight noise attracted Eunice and she turned to look at Jane Groat.

She was sitting bolt upright, her black eyes staring, her face working convulsively.

"What woman?" she asked harshly. "What are you talking about?"

Digby seemed as much surprised as the girl to discover the effect the statement had made upon his mother.

"The woman who has been getting into this house and making herself a confounded nuisance with her melodramatic signature."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Groat with painful slowness.

"She has left the mark of a blue hand on my door——"

Before he could finish the sentence his mother was on her feet, staring down at him with terror in her eyes.

"A blue hand, a blue hand!" she cried wildly. "What was that woman's name?"

"According to the police report, Madge Benson," said Digby.

For a second she glared at him wildly.

"Blue hand, blue hand," she mumbled and would have collapsed but for the fact that Eunice had recognized the symptoms and was by her side and took her in her strong young arms.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

OUTSIDE the door in the darkened passage a man was listening attentively. He had trailed Digby Groat all that evening, and had followed him into the house. Hearing a movement of footsteps within, he slipped into a side passage and waited. Eunice flew past the entrance to the passage and Jim Steele thought it was time that he made a move. In a few minutes the house would be aroused, for he guessed that the old woman had collapsed. It was a desperate, mad enterprise of his, to enter the great household at so early an hour, but he had a particular reason for wishing to discover the contents of a letter which he had seen slipped into Digby's hand that night.

Jim had been following him without success until Digby Groat had alighted at Piccadilly Circus apparently to buy a newspaper. Then a stranger had edged close to him and Jim had seen the quick passage of the white envelope. He meant to see that letter.

He reached the ground floor in safety and hesitated. Should he go into the laboratory whither Digby was certain to come, or should he——? A hurried footstep on the stairs above decided him: he slipped through the door leading to Digby's study. Hiding place there was none: he had observed the room when he had been in there a few days previously. He was safe so long as nobody came in and turned on the lights. Jim

heard the footsteps pass the door, and pulled his soft felt hat farther over his eyes. The lower part of his face he had already concealed with a black silk handkerchief, and if the worst came to the worst, he could battle his way out and seek safety in flight. Nobody would recognize him in the old gray suit he wore, and the soft collarless shirt. It would not be a very noble end to the adventure, but it would be less ignominious than being exposed again to the scorn of Eunice.

Suddenly his heart beat faster. Somebody was coming into the library. He saw the unknown open the door and he crouched down so that the big library table covered him from observation. Instantly the room was flooded with light; Jim could only see the legs of the intruder, and they were the legs of Digby Groat. Digby moved to the table, and Jim heard the tear of paper as an envelope was slit, and then an exclamation of anger from the man.

"Mr. Groat, please come quickly!"

It was the voice of Eunice calling from the floor above, and Digby hurried out, leaving the door open. He was scarcely out of sight before Jim had risen; his first glance was at the table. The letter lay as Digby had thrown it down, and he thrust it into his pocket. In a second he was through the doorway and in the passage. Jackson was standing by the foot of the stairs looking up, and for a moment he did not see Jim; then, at the sight of the masked face, he opened his mouth to shout a warning, and at that instant Jim struck at him twice, and the man went down with a crash.

"What is that?" said Digby's voice, but Jim was out of the house, the door slammed behind him, and

was racing along the side-walk toward Berkeley Square, before Digby Groat knew what had happened. He slackened his pace, turned sharp to the right, so that he came back on his track, and stopped under a street light to read the letter.

Parts of its contents contained no information for him. But there was one line which interested him:

"Steele is trailing you: we will fix him to-night."

He read the line again and smiled as he walked on at a more leisurely pace.

Once or twice he thought he was being followed, and turned round, but saw nobody. As he strolled up Portland Place, deserted at this hour of the night, save for an occasional car, his suspicion that he was being followed was strengthened. Two men, walking one behind the other, and keeping close to the railings, were about twenty yards behind him.

"I'll give you a run for your money, my lads," muttered Jim, and crossing Marylebone Road, he reached the loneliest part of London, the outer circle of Regent's Park. And then he began to run: and Jim had taken both the sprint and the two-mile at the Varsity sports. He heard swift feet following and grinned to himself. Then came the noise of a taxi door shutting. They had picked up the "crawler" he had passed.

"That is very unsporting," said Jim, and turning, ran in the opposite direction. He went past the cab like a flash, and heard it stop and a loud voice order the taxi to turn, and he slackened his pace. He had already decided upon his plan of action—one so beauti-



fully simple and so embarrassing to Digby Groat and his servitors, if his suspicions were confirmed, that it was worth the bluff. He had dropped to a walk at the sight of a policeman coming toward him. As the taxi came abreast he stepped into the roadway, gripped the handle of the door and jerked it open.

"Come out," he said sternly.

In the reflected light from the taximeter lantern he saw the damaged face of an old friend.

"Come out, Jackson, and explain just why you're following me through the peaceful streets of this great city."

The man was loath to obey, but Jim gripped him by the waistcoat and dragged him out, to the taxi-driver's astonishment.

The second man was obviously a foreigner, a little dark, thin-faced man with a mahogany face, and they stood sheepishly regarding their quarry.

"To-morrow you can go back to Mr. Digby Groat, and tell him that the next time he sets the members of the Thirteen Gang to trail me, I'll come after him with enough evidence in each hand to leave him swinging in the brick-lined pit at Wandsworth. Do you understand that?"

"I don't know what you mean about to-morrow," said the innocent Jackson in an aggrieved tone. "We could have the law on you for dragging us out of the cab."

"Try it, here comes a policeman," said Jim. He gripped him by the collar and dragged him toward the interested constable. "I think this man wants to make a charge against me."

"No, I don't," growled Jackson, terrified as to what

his master would say when he heard of this undramatic end to the trailing of Jim.

"Well, then, I make a charge against him."

It was the bluff that Jim had planned, a bluff which might very well come off. "I charge him with being in possession of weapons for the purpose of committing a felony. I further charge him under the Arms Act with having no license to carry firearms."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

**T**HERE is little that is romantic about a Police Station, and Digby Groat, who came in a towering rage to release his servants, was so furious that he could not even see the humorous side of the situation.

Once outside the building he dismissed one, Antonio Fuentes, with a curse, and poured the vials of wrath upon the unhappy Jackson.

"You fool, you blundering dolt," he stormed. "I told you to keep the man in sight; Bronson would have carried out my orders without Steele knowing. Why the hell did you carry a revolver?"

"How did I know he would play a dirty trick on me like that?" growled Jackson, "besides, I've never heard of the Firearms Act."

It was a stupid but a dangerous situation, thought Digby Groat, as he sat gnawing his nails in the library. It was an old theory of his that great schemes come to nought and great crimes are detected through some contemptible little slip on the part of the conspirators. What Jim had done in the simplest, easiest manner, was to set the police moving against the Thirteen, and to bring two of its members into the searching light of a magisterial enquiry. What was worse, he had associated Digby Groat with the proceedings, though Digby had an excuse that Jackson was his valet, and as such, entitled to his interest. He had disclaimed all knowl-

edge of Fuentes, but, as an act of generosity, as the Spaniard was a friend of his servant, had gone bail for him also.

Had the Thirteen brought off a big coup, their tracks would have been so hidden, their preparations so elaborated, that they would have defied detection. And here through a simple offense, which carried no more than a penalty of a five-pound fine, two of the members of the gang had come under police observation. Madmen!

It was a sleepless night for him—even his three hours was denied him. The doctor attending his mother did not leave until past three o'clock.

"It is not exactly a stroke, but I think a collapse due to some sudden shock."

"Probably you're right," said Digby. "But I thought it best to call you in. Do you think she will recover?"

"Oh, yes. I should imagine she'll be all right in the morning."

Digby nodded. He agreed with that conclusion, without being particularly pleased to hear it.

Difficulties were increasing daily, it seemed; new obstacles were besetting the smooth path of his life, and he traced them one by one and reduced them to a single cause—Jim Steele.

The next morning, after he had telephoned to a shady solicitor whom he knew, ordering him to defend the two men who were to be charged at Marylebone, with offences under the Firearms Act, he sent for Eunice Weldon.

"Miss Weldon," he said, "I am making changes in this house, and I thought of taking my mother to the

country next week. The air here doesn't seem to agree with her, and I despair of her getting better unless she has a radical change of environment."

She nodded gravely.

"I am afraid I shall not be able to accompany you, Mr. Groat."

He looked up at her sharply.

"What do you mean, Miss Weldon?" he asked.

"There is not sufficient work for me to do here, and I have decided to return to my old employment," she said.

"I am sorry to hear that, Miss Weldon," he said quietly, "but, of course, I will put no obstacle in your way. This has been a calamitous house recently, and your experience has not been an exceedingly happy one, and, therefore, I quite understand why you are anxious to leave us. I could have wished that you would have stayed with my mother until she was settled in my place in the country, but even on this point I will not press you."

She expected that he would have been annoyed, and his courtesy impressed her.

"I shall not, of course, think of leaving until I have done all that I possibly can," she hastened to add, as he expected her to do, "and really I have not been at all unhappy here, Mr. Groat."

"Mr. Steele doesn't like me, does he?" he smiled, and he saw her stiffen.

"Mr. Steele has no voice in my plans," she said, "and I have not seen him for several days."

So there had been a quarrel, thought Digby, and decided that he must know a little more of this. He was too wily to ask her point-blank, but the fact that they

had not met on the previous day was known to him.

Eunice was glad to get the interview over and to go up to Mrs. Groat, who had sent for her a little earlier.

The old woman was in bed propped up with pillows, and apparently was her normal self again.

"You've been a long time," she grumbled.

"I had to see your son, Mrs. Groat," said Eunice.

The old woman muttered something under her breath.

"Shut the door and lock it," she said. "Have you got your note-book?"

Eunice pulled up a chair to the bedside, and wondered what was the important epistle that Mrs. Groat had decided to dictate. Usually she hated writing letters except with her own hand, and the reason for her summons had taken the girl by surprise.

"I want you to write in my name to Mary Weatherwale. Write that down." Old Mrs. Groat spelt the name. "The address is in Somerset—Hill Farm, Retherley, Somerset. Now say to her that I am very ill, and that I hope she will forgive our old quarrel and will come up and stay with me—underline that I am very ill," said Jane Groat emphatically. "Tell her that I will pay her expenses and give her £5 a week. Is that too much?" she asked. "No, don't put the salary at all. I'll be bound she'll come; they're poorly off, the Weatherwales. Tell her she must come at once. Underline that, too."

The girl scribbled down her instructions.

"Now listen, Miss Weldon." Jane Groat lowered her voice. "You are to write this letter, and not to let my son know that you have done it: do you under-

stand? Post it yourself; don't give it to that horrible Jackson. And again I tell you not to let my son know."

Eunice wondered what was the reason for the mystery, but she carried out the old woman's instructions, and posted the letter without Digby's knowledge.

There was no word from Jim, though she guessed he was the masked stranger who had knocked down Jackson in the hall. The strain of waiting was beginning to tell upon Eunice; she had grown oddly nervous, started at every sound, and it was this unusual exhibition of nerves which had finally decided her to leave Grosvenor Square and return to the less exciting life at the photographic studio.

Why didn't Jim write, she asked herself fretfully, and immediately after, relentless logic demanded of her why she did not write to Jim.

She went for a walk in the park that afternoon hoping that she would see him, but although she sat for an hour under his favorite tree, he did not put in an appearance and she went home depressed and angry with herself.

A stamp upon a postcard would have brought him, but that postcard she would not write.

The next day brought Mrs. Mary Weatherwale, a stout, cheery woman of sixty, with a rosy apple face. She came in a four-wheeled cab, depositing her luggage in the hall, and greeted Eunice like an old friend.

"How is she, my darling?" ("Darling" was a favorite word of hers, Eunice discovered with amusement.) "Poor old Jane, I haven't seen her for years and years. We used to be good friends once, you

know, very good friends, but she—but there, let bygones be bygones, darling; show me to her room, will you?”

It required all the cheerfulness of Mrs. Weatherwale to disguise her shock at the appearance of her one time friend.

“Why, Jane,” she said, “what’s the matter with you?”

“Sit down, Mary,” said the other pettishly. “All right, young lady, you needn’t wait.”

This ungrateful dismissal was addressed to Eunice, who was very glad to make her escape. She was passing through the hall later in the afternoon, when Digby Groat came in. He looked at the luggage, which had not been removed from the hall, and turned with a frown to Eunice.

“What is the meaning of this?” he asked. “To whom does this belong?”

“A friend of Mrs. Groat is coming to stay,” said Eunice.

“A friend of mother’s?” he answered quickly. “Do you know her name?”

“Mrs. Weatherwale.”

She saw an instant change come over his face.

“Mrs. Weatherwale, eh,” he said slowly. “Coming to stay here? At my mother’s invitation, I suppose.” He stripped his gloves and flung them on to the hall table and went up the stairs two at a time.

What happened in the sick room Eunice could only guess. The first intimation she had that all was not well was the appearance of Mrs. Weatherwale strutting down the stairs, her face as red as a turkey-cock, her



bead bonnet trembling with anger. She caught sight of Eunice and beckoned her.

"Get somebody to find a cab for me, my darling," she said. "I'm going back to Somerset. I've been thrown out, my darling! What do you think of that? A woman of my age and my respectability; thrown out by a dirty little devil of a boy that I wouldn't harbor in my cow yard." She was choleric and her voice was trembling with righteous rage. "I'm talking about you," she said raising her voice, and addressing somebody, apparently Digby, who was out of sight of Eunice. "You always were a cruel little beast, and if anything happens to your mother, I'm going to the police."

"You had better get out before I send for a policeman," said Digby's growling voice.

"I know you," she shook her fist at her invisible enemy. "I've known you for twenty-three years, my boy, and a more cruel and nastier man never lived!"

Digby came slowly down the stairs, a smile on his face.

"Really, Mrs. Weatherwale," he said, "you are unreasonable. I simply do not want my mother to be associated with the kind of people she chose as her friends when she was a girl. I can't be responsible for her vulgar tastes then; I certainly am responsible now."

The rosy face of the woman flushed an even deeper red.

"Common! Vulgar!" she spluttered. "You say that? You dirty little foreigner. Ah! That got home. I know your secret, Mr. Digby Groat!"

If eyes could kill, she would have died at that moment. He turned at the foot of the stairs and walked into his study, and slammed the door behind him.

"Whenever you want to know anything about that!" —Mrs. Weatherwale pointed at the closed door—"send for me. I've got letters from his mother about him when he was a child of so high, that would make your hair stand on ends, darling."

When at last a cab bore the indignant lady from Grosvenor Square, Eunice breathed a sigh of relief. One more family skeleton, she thought, but she had already inspected the grisly bones. She would not be sorry to follow in Mrs. Weatherwale's footsteps, though, unknown to her, Digby Groat had other plans.

Those plans were maturing, when he heard a sharp rat-tat at the door and come out into the hall.

"Was that a telegram for me?" he asked.

"No, for me," said Eunice, and there was no need to ask whom that message was from; her shining eyes, her flushed face, told their own story.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

“JIM!”

Eunice came running across the grass with outstretched hands, oblivious to the fact that it was broad daylight and that she was being watched by at least a hundred idle loungers in the park.

Jim took both her hands in his and she experienced a moment of serene comfort. Then they both talked at once; they were both apologetic, interrupting one another's explanations with the expression of their own contrition.

“Jim, I'm going to leave Mrs. Groat's house,” she said when they had reached sanity.

“Thank God for that,” said Jim.

“You are so solemn about it,” she laughed. “Did you really think I was in any danger there?”

“I know you were,” he said.

She had so much to tell him that she did not know where to begin.

“Were you sorry not to see me?”

“The days I have not seen you are dead, and wiped off the calendar,” said Jim.

“Oh, before I forget,” said Eunice, “Mrs. Weatherwale has gone.”

“Mrs. Weatherwale!” he repeated, puzzled.

“I haven't told you? No, of course not, I did not see you yesterday. But Mrs. Groat asked me to write to Mrs. Weatherwale, who is an old friend of hers,

asking her to come and stay. I think Mrs. Groat is rather afraid of Digby."

"And she came?" asked Jim.

The girl nodded.

"She came and stayed about one hour, then arrived my lord Digby, who bundled her unceremoniously into the street. There is no love lost there, either, Jim. The dear old lady hated him. She was a charming old soul and called me 'darling.'"

"Who wouldn't?" said Jim. "I can call you darling even though I am not a charming old soul. Go on. So she went away? I wonder what she knows about Digby?"

"She knows everything. She knows about Estremeda, of that I am sure. Jim, doesn't that make a difference?"

He shook his head.

"If you mean does it make any difference about Digby inheriting his mother's money when she gets it, I can tell you that it makes none. The will does not specify that he is the son of John Groat, and the fact that he was born before she married this unfortunate shipping clerk does not affect the issue."

"When is the money to be made over to the Groats?"

"Next Thursday," said Jim, with a groan, "and I am just as far from stopping the transfer of the property as I have ever been."

He had not told her of his meeting with Lady Mary Danton. That was not his secret alone. Nor could he tell her that Lady Mary was the woman who had warned her.

They strolled across the Park towards the Serpentine and Jim was unusually preoccupied.

"Do you know, Eunice, that I have an uncanny feeling that you really are in some way associated with the Danton fortune?"

She laughed and clung tighter to his arm.

"Jim, you would make me Queen of England if you could," she said, "and you have just as much chance of raising me to the throne as you have of proving that I am somebody else's child. I don't want to be anybody else's really," she said. "I was very, very fond of my mother and it nearly broke my heart when she died. And daddy was a darling."

He nodded.

"Of course, it is a fantastic idea," he said, "and I am flying in face of all the facts. I have taken the trouble to discover where you were born. I have a friend in Cape Town who made the inquiries for me."

"Eunice May Weldon," she laughed. "So you can abandon that idea, can't you?" she said.

Strolling along by the side of the Serpentine they had reached the bridge near the magazine and were standing waiting until a car had passed before they crossed the road. Somebody in the car raised his hat.

"Who was that?" said Jim.

"Digby Groat," she smiled, "my nearly late employer! Don't let us go to the tea-shop, Jim," she said, "let us go to your flat—I'd love to."

He looked at her dubiously.

"It is not customary for bachelors to give tea-parties to young females," he said.

"I'm sure it is," she waved aside his objection. "I'm perfectly certain it happens every day only they don't speak about it."

The flat delighted her and she took off her coat and busied herself in the little kitchenette.

"You told me it was an attic with bare boards," she said reproachfully as she was laying the cloth.

To Jim, stretched in his big chair, she was a thing of sheer delight. He wanted no more than to sit for ever and watch her flitting from room to room. The sound of her fresh voice was a delicious narcotic, and even when she called him, as she did, again and again, to explain some curio of his which hung in the hall, the spell was not broken.

"Everything is speckless," she said as she brought in the tea, "and I'm sure you haven't polished up those brasses and cleaned that china."

"You're right first time," said Jim lazily. "An unprepossessing lady comes in every morning at half-past seven and works her fingers to the bone, as she has told me more times than once, though she manages to keep more flesh on those bones than seems comfortable for her."

"And there is your famous train," she said jumping up and going to the window as an express whizzed down the declivity. "Oh, Jim, look at those boys," she gasped in horror.

Across the line and supported by two stout poles, one of which stood in the courtyard of the flat, was a stretch of thin telegraph wires, and on these a small and adventurous urchin was pulling himself across hand-over-hand, to the joy of his companions seated on the opposite wall of the cutting.

"The young devil," said Jim admiringly.

Another train shrieked past, and running down into Euston trains moved at a good speed. The telegraph

wire had sagged under the weight of the boy to such an extent that he had to lift his legs to avoid touching the tops of the carriages.

"If the police catch him," mused Jim, "they will fine him a sovereign and give him a birching. In reality he ought to be given a medal. These little beggars are the soldiers of the future, Eunice, and some day he will reproduce that fearlessness of danger, and he will earn the Victoria Cross a jolly sight more than I earned it."

She laughed and dropped her head against his shoulder.

"You queer man," she said, and then returned to the contemplation of the young climber, who had now reached the opposite wall amidst the approving yells and shouts of his diminutive comrades.

"Now let us drink our tea, because I must get back," said the girl.

The cup was at her lips when the door opened and a woman came in. Eunice did not hear the turning of the handle and her first intimation of the stranger's presence was the word "Jim." She looked up. The woman in the doorway was, by all standards, beautiful, she noticed with a pang. Age had not lined or marred the beauty of her face and the strands of gray in her hair added to her attraction. For a moment they looked at one another, the woman and the girl, and then the intruder with a nod and a smile, said:

"I will see you again. I am sorry," and went out closing the door behind her.

The silence that followed was painful. Jim started three times to speak, but stopped as he realized the futility of explaining to the girl the reason of the

woman's presence. He could not tell her she was Lady Mary Danton.

"She called you 'Jim,'" said the girl slowly. "Is she a friend of yours?"

"Er—yes," he replied awkwardly. "She is Mrs. Fane, a neighbor."

"Mrs. Fane," repeated the girl, "but you told me she was paralyzed and could not get up. You said she had never been out of doors for years."

Jim swallowed something.

"She called you 'Jim,'" said the girl again. "Are you very great friends?"

"Well, we are rather," said Jim huskily. "The fact is, Eunice——"

"How did she come in?" asked the girl with a frown. "She must have let herself in with a key. Has she a key of your flat?"

Jim gulped.

"Well, as a matter of fact——" he began.

"Has she, Jim?"

"Yes, she has. I can't explain, Eunice, but you've got——"

"I see," she said quietly. "She is very pretty, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is rather pretty," admitted Jim miserably. "You see, we have business transactions together, and frequently I am out and she wants to get to my telephone. She has no telephone in her own flat, you see, Eunice," he went on lamely.

"I see," said the girl, "and she calls you 'Jim'?"

"Because we are good friends," he floundered. "Really, Eunice, I hope you are not putting any misconstruction upon that incident."



She heaved a little sigh.

"I suppose it is all right, Jim," she said, and pushed away her plate. "I don't think I'll wait any longer. Please don't come back with me, I'd rather you didn't. I can get a cab, there's a rank opposite the flat, I remember."

Jim cursed the accident which had brought the lady into his room at that moment and cursed himself that he had not made a clean breast of the whole thing, even at the risk of betraying Lady Mary.

He had done sufficient harm by his incoherent explanation and he offered no other as he helped the girl into her coat.

"You are sure you'd rather go alone?" he said miserably.

She nodded.

They were standing on the landing. Lady Mary's front door was ajar and from within came the shrill ring of a telephone bell. She raised her grave eyes to Jim.

"Your friend has the key of your flat because she has no telephone of her own, didn't you say, Jim?"

He made no reply.

"I never thought you would lie to me," she said, and he watched her disappear down the staircase with an aching heart.

He had hardly reached his room and flung himself in his chair by the side of the tea-table, when Lady Mary followed him into the room.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I hadn't the slightest idea she would be here."

"It doesn't matter," said Jim with a wan smile, "only it makes things rather awkward for me. I told

her a lie and she found me out, or rather, your infernal telephone did, Lady Mary."

"Then you were stupid," was all the comfort she gave him.

"Why didn't you stay?" he asked. "That made it look so queer."

"There were many reasons why I couldn't stay," said Lady Mary. "Jim, do you remember the enquiries I made about this very girl, Eunice Weldon, and which you made, too?"

He nodded.

He wasn't interested in Eunice Weldon's obvious parentage at that moment.

"You remember she was born at Rondebosch?"

"Yes," he said listlessly. "Even she admits it," he added with a feeble attempt at a jest.

"Does she admit this?" asked Lady Mary. She pushed a telegram across the table to Jim, and he picked it up and read:

"Eunice May Weldon died in Cape Town at the age of twelve months and three days, and is buried at Rosebank Cemetery. Plot No. 7963."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

JIM read the cablegram again, scarcely believing his eyes or his understanding.

"Buried at the age of twelve months," he said incredulously, "but how absurd. She is here, alive, besides which, I recently met a man who knew the Weldons and remembered Eunice as a child. There is no question of substitution."

"It is puzzling, isn't it?" said Lady Mary softly, as she put the telegram in her bag. "But here is a very important fact. The man who sent me this cablegram is one of the most reliable private detectives in South Africa."

Eunice Weldon was born, Eunice Weldon had died, and yet Eunice Weldon was very much alive at that moment, though she was wishing she were dead.

Jim leant his elbow on the table and rested his chin on his palm.

"I must confess that I am now completely rattled," he said. "Then if the girl died, it is obvious the parents adopted another girl and that girl was Eunice. The question is where did she come from, because there was never any question of her adoption, so far as she knew."

She nodded.

"I have already cabled to my agent to ask him to inquire on this question of adoption," she said, "and in the meantime the old idea is gaining ground, Jim."

His eyes met hers.

"You mean that Eunice is your daughter?"

She nodded slowly.

"That circular scar on her wrist? You know nothing about it?"

She shook her head.

"It may have been done after——" she faltered, "after—I lost sight of her."

"Lady Mary, will you explain how you came to lose sight of her?" asked Jim.

She shook her head.

"Not yet," she said.

"Then perhaps you will answer another question. You know Mrs. Groat?"

She nodded.

"Do you know a woman named Weatherwale?"

Lady Mary's eyes opened.

"Mary Weatherwale, yes. She was a farmer's daughter who was very fond of Jane, a nice, decent woman. I often wondered how Jane came to make such a friend. Why do you ask?"

Jim told her what had happened when Mrs. Weatherwale had arrived at Grosvenor Square.

"Let us put as many of our cards on the table as are not too stale to exhibit," she said. "Do you believe that Jane Groat had some part in the disappearance of my daughter?"

"Honestly I do," said Jim. "Don't you?"

She shook her head.

"I used to think so," she said quietly, "but when I made inquiries, she was exonerated beyond question. She is a wicked woman, as wicked as any that has

ever been born," she said with a sudden fire that sent the color flying to her face, "but she was not so wicked that she was responsible for little Dorothy's fate."

"You will not tell me any more about her?"

She shook her head.

"There is something you could say which might make my investigation a little easier," said Jim.

"There is nothing I can say—yet," she said in a low voice, as she rose, and without a word of farewell, glided from the room.

Jim's mind was made up. In the light of that extraordinary cablegram from South Africa, his misunderstanding with Eunice faded into insignificance. If she were Lady Mary's daughter! He gasped at the thought which, with all its consequences, came as a new possibility, even though he had pondered it in his mind.

He fixed upon Jane Groat as one who could supply the key of the mystery, but every attempt he had made to get the particulars of her past had been frustrated by ignorance, or the unwillingness of all who had known her in her early days.

There was little chance of seeing Septimus Salter in his office, so he went round to the garage where he housed his little car, and set forth on a voyage of discovery to Chislehurst, where Mr. Salter lived.

The old gentleman was alone; his wife and his eldest son, an officer, who was staying with him, had gone to Harrogate, and he was more genial in his reception than Jim had a right to expect.

"You'll stay to dinner, of course," he said.

Jim shook his head.

"No, thank you, sir, I'm feeling rather anxious just now. I came to ask you if you knew Mrs. Weatherwale."

The lawyer frowned.

"Weatherwale, Weatherwale," he mused, "yes, I remember the name. I seldom forget a name. She appears in Mrs. Groat's will, I think, as a legatee for a few hundred pounds. Her father was one of old Danton's tenants."

"That is the woman," said Jim, and told his employer all that he had learnt about Mrs. Weatherwale's ill-fated visit to London.

"It only shows," said the lawyer when he had finished, "how the terrific secrets which we lawyers think are locked away in steel boxes and stowed below the ground in musty cellars, are the property of Tom, Dick and Harry! We might as well save ourselves all the trouble. Estremeda is, of course, the Spanish Marquis who practically lived with the Dantons when Jane was a young woman. He is, as obviously, the father of Digby Groat, and the result of this woman's mad passion for the Spaniard. I knew there was some sort of scandal attached to her name, but this explains why her father would never speak to her, and why he cut her out of his will. I'm quite sure that Jonathan Danton knew nothing whatever about his sister's escape, or he would not have left her his money. He was as strait-laced as any of the Dantons, but thanks to his father's reticence, it would seem that Mrs. Groat is going to benefit."

"And the son?" said Jim, and the lawyer nodded.

"She may leave her money where she wishes—to anybody's son, for the matter of that," said the law-

yer. "A curious case, a very curious case," he shook his gray head. "What do you intend doing?"

"I am going down to Somerset to see Mrs. Weatherwale," said Jim. "She may give us a string which will lead somewhere."

"If she'll give you a string that will lead Mr. Digby Groat to prison," growled the old lawyer, "get hold of it, Steele, and pull like the devil!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

**W**HEN his alarm clock turned him out at six in the morning, Jim was both sleepy and inclined to be pessimistic. But as his mind cleared and he realized what results the day's investigations might bring, he faced his journey with a lighter heart.

Catching the seven o'clock from Paddington he reached the nearest station to Mrs. Weatherwale's residence soon after nine. He had not taken any breakfast, and he delayed his journey for half-an-hour, whilst the hostess of a small inn facing the station prepared him the meal without which no Englishman could live, as she humorously described it, a dish of eggs and bacon.

It seemed as though he were in another world to that which he had left behind at Paddington. The trees were a little greener, the lush grasses of the meadows were a more vivid emerald and overhead in the blue sky defying sight, a skylark trilled passionately and was answered somewhere from the ground. Tiny furry shapes in their bright spring coats darted across the white roadway almost under his feet. He crossed a crumbling stone bridge and paused to look down into the shallow racing stream that foamed and bubbled and swirled on its way to the distant sea.

The old masons who had dressed these powdery ashlar and laid the moss green stones of the buttresses, were dead when burly Henry lorded it at Westminster.



These stones had seen the epochs pass, and the maidens who had leant against the parapet listening with down-cast eyes to their young swains had become old women and dust and forgotten.

Jim heaved a sigh as he resumed his trudge. Life would not be long enough for him, if Eunice . . . if!

He shook the thought from him and climbed steadily to his destination.

Hill Farm was a small house standing in about three acres of land, devoted mainly to market garden. There was no Mr. Weatherwale. He had been dead for twelve years, Jim learnt at the inn, but the old lady had a son who assisted in the management of the farm.

Jim strode out to what was to prove a pleasant walk through the glories of a Somerset countryside, and he found Mrs. Weatherwale in the act of butter-making. She had a pasture and a dozen cows, as she informed him later.

"I don't want to talk about Jane Groat," she said decisively, when he broached the object of his visit. "I'll never forgive that boy of hers for the trouble he gave me, apart from the insult. I gave up my work and had to hire a woman to take charge here and look after the boy—there's my fare to London——"

"I daresay all that could be arranged, Mrs. Weatherwale," said Jim with a laugh. "Mr. Digby Groat will certainly repay you."

"Are you a friend of his?" she asked suspiciously, "because if you are——"

"I am not a friend of his," said Jim. "On the contrary, I dislike him probably as much as you do."

"That is not possible," she said, "for I would as soon see the devil as that yellow-faced monkey."

She wiped her hands on her apron and led the way to the sunny little parlor.

"Sit ye down, Mr. What-you-may-call-it," she said briskly.

"Steele," murmured Jim.

"Mr. Steele, is it? Just sit down there, will you?" She indicated a window-seat covered with bright chintz. "Now tell me just what you want to know."

"I want to know something about Jane Groat's youth, who were her friends, and what you know about Digby Groat?"

Mrs. Weatherwale shook her head.

"I can't tell you much about that, sir," she said. "Her father was old Danton who owned Kennett Hall. You can see it from here," she pointed across the country to a gray mass of buildings that showed above the hill-crest.

"Jane frequently came over to the farm. My father had a bigger one in those days. All Hollyhock Hill belonged to him, but he lost his money through horses, drat them!" she said good-humoredly and apparently had no particular grievance against the thoroughbred race horse.

"And we got quite friendly. It was unusual I admit, she being a lady of quality and me being a farmer's daughter, but lord! I've got stacks of letters from her, or rather, I had. I burnt them this morning."

"You've burnt them?" said Jim in dismay. "I was hoping that I should find something I wanted to know from those."

She shook her head.

"There's nothing there you would find, except a lot

of silly nonsense about a man she fell in love with, a Spanish man."

"The Marquis of Estremeda?" suggested Jim.

She closed her lips.

"Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't," she said. "I'm not going to scandalize at my time of life, and at her time of life, too. We've all made mistakes in our time, and I daresay you'll make yours, if you haven't made them already. Which reminds me, Mr.— I don't remember your name?"

"Steele," said Jim patiently.

"Well, that reminds me there's a duck of a girl in that house. How Jane can allow a beautiful creature like that to come into contact with a beast like Digby, I don't know. But that is all by-the-way. No, I burnt the letters, except a few. I kept one or two to prove that a boy doesn't change his character when he grows up. Why, it may be," she said good-humoredly, "when Digby is hanged the newspaper reporters would like to see these and they will be worth money to me!"

Jim laughed. Her good humor was infectious and when after an absence of five minutes she returned to the room with a small box covered with faded green plush, he asked:

"You know nothing of Digby Groat's recent life?"

She shook her head.

"I only knew him as a boy, and a wicked little devil he was, the sort of boy who would pull a fly's wings off for the sport of it. I used to think those stories about boys were lies, but it was true about him. Do you know what his chief delight was as a boy?"

"No, I don't," smiled Jim. "It was something unpleasant I am sure."

"To come on a Friday afternoon to Farmer Johnson's and see the pigs killed for market," she said grimly. "That's the sort of boy he was."

She took out a bundle of faded letters and fixing her large steel-rimmed spectacles, read them over.

"Here's one," she said, "that will show you the kind of kid he was."

"I flogged Digby to-day. He tied a bunch of crackers round the kitten's neck and let them off. The poor little creature had to be killed."

"That's Digby," said Mrs. Weatherwale, looking over her glasses. "There isn't a letter here which doesn't say that she had to beat him for something or other," she read on, reading half to herself, and Jim heard the word "baby."

"What baby was that?"

She looked at him.

"It wasn't her baby," she said.

"But whose was it?" insisted Jim.

"It was a baby she was looking after."

"Her sister-in-law's?" demanded Jim.

The woman nodded.

"Yes, Lady Mary Danton's, poor little soul—he did a cruel thing to her, too."

Jim dare not speak, and without encouragement Mrs. Weatherwale said:

"Listen to this, if you want to understand the kind of little devil Digby was."

"I had to give Digby a severe flogging to-day. Really, the child is naturally cruel. What do you imagine he did? He took a sixpence, heated it in the fire and put it on the poor baby's wrist. It left a circular burn."

"Great God!" said Jim springing to his feet, his face white. "A circular burn on the wrist?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"Yes, why?"

So that was the explanation, and the heiress to the Danton millions was not Digby Groat or his mother, but the girl who was called Eunice Weldon, or, as the world would know her, Dorothy Danton!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

**E**UNICE was Lady Mary's daughter! There was no doubt of it, no possible doubt. His instinct had proved to be right. How had she got to South Africa? He had yet to find a solution to the mystery.

Mrs. Weatherwale's rosy face was a picture of astonishment. For a moment she thought her visitor had gone mad.

"Will you read that piece again about Digby Groat burning the baby's wrist," said Jim slowly, and after a troubled glance at him, she complied.

"The little baby was lost soon after," she explained. "It went out with a nurse; one of Jane's girls took it out in a boat, and the boat must have been run down by some ship."

And then a light dawned upon Jim.

What ships passed to the East of the Goodwins (for it was near there that the disaster must have occurred) on the day of the tragedy? He must find it out immediately and he must take the letter from Jane to her friend in order to place it before Septimus Salter. Here, however, the woman demurred, and Jim, sitting down again, told her plainly and frankly, all his fears and suspicions.

"What, that beautiful girl I saw in Jane's house?" said Mrs. Weatherwale in amazement. "You don't tell me!"

"I do," said Jim. "She has the mark on her wrist, a burn, and now I remember! Mrs. Groat knows she is the daughter of Lady Mary, too! It was the sight of that scar which brought about her stroke."

"I don't want any harm to happen to Jane, she hasn't been a bad friend of mine, but it seems to me only justice to the young lady that she should have the letter. As a matter of fact I nearly burnt it."

"Thank God you didn't," said Jim fervently.

He carried his prize back by the first train that left for London and dashed into Salter's office with his news.

"If your theory is correct," said the old man when he had finished, "there ought not to be any difficulty in discovering the link between the child's disappearance and her remarkable appearance in Cape Town as Eunice Weldon. We have had confirmation from South Africa that Eunice Weldon did die at this tender age, so, therefore, your Eunice can not be the same girl. I should advise you to get busy, because the day after to-morrow I hand over the Danton estate to Mrs. Groat's new lawyers, and from what I can see of things," said Mr. Salter grimly, "it is Digby Groat's intention to sell immediately the whole of the Danton property."

"Does that amount to much?"

"It represents more than three quarters of the estate," said the lawyer to Jim's surprise. "The Lakeside properties are worth four hundred thousand pounds, they include about twenty-four homesteads and six fairly big farms. You remember he came here some time ago, to question us as to whether he had the right of sale. I had a talk with Bennetts, they are

his new solicitors, only this morning," Mr. Salter went on stroking his big chin thoughtfully, "and it is pretty clear that Digby intends selling out. He showed Bennett the Power of Attorney which his mother gave him this morning."

The lawyer was faithfully interpreting Digby Groat's intentions. The will which Eunice had found had shocked him. He was determined that he should not be at the mercy of a capricious old woman who he knew disliked him as intensely as he hated her, and he had induced his mother to change her lawyers, not so much because he had any prejudice against Salter, but because he needed a new solicitor who would carry through the instructions which Salter would question.

Digby was determined to turn the lands and revenues of the Danton Estate into solid cash—cash which he could handle, and once it was in his bank he would breathe more freely.

That was the secret of his business in the city, the formation of a syndicate to take over the Danton properties on a cash basis, and he had so well succeeded in interesting several wealthy financiers in the scheme, that it wanted but the stroke of a pen to complete the deal.

"Aren't there sufficient facts now," asked Jim, "to prove that Eunice is Lady Mary's daughter?"

Salter shook his head.

"No," he said, "you must get a closer connection of evidence. But as I say it should not be very difficult for you to do that. You know the date the child disappeared. It was on the 21st June, 1901. To refresh your memory I would remark that it was in that year the Boer War was being fought out."



Jim's first call was at the Union African Steamship Company, and he made that just when the office was closing.

Fortunately the assistant manager was there, took him into the office and made a search of his records.

"None of our ships left London River on the 20th or 21st June," he said, "and, anyway, only our intermediate boats sail from there. The mail steamers sail from Southampton. The last ship to pass Southampton was the *Central Castle*. She was carrying troops to South Africa and she called at Plymouth on the 20th, so she must have passed Margate three days before."

"What other lines of steamers run to South Africa?"

The manager gave him a list, and it was a longer one than Jim had expected.

He hurried home to break the news to Lady Mary, but she was out. Her maid, the mysterious Madge Benson, said she had left and did not expect to be back for two or three days, and Jim remembered that Lady Mary had talked of going to Paris.

"Do you know where she would stay in Paris?"

"I don't even know she's gone to Paris, sir," said the woman with a smile. "Lady Mary never tells me her plans."

Jim groaned.

There was nothing to do but to wait until to-morrow and pursue his enquiries. In the meantime it was growing upon him that Eunice and he were bad friends. He smiled to himself. What would she say when she discovered that the woman who called him "Jim" was her mother! He must possess his soul in patience for another twenty-four hours.

Suddenly a thought came to him, a thought which

struck the smile from his lips. Eunice Weldon might forgive him and might marry him and change the drab roadway of life to a path of flowers, but Dorothy Danton was a rich woman, wealthy beyond her dreams, and Jim Steele was a poor man. He sat back in his chair to consider that disquieting revelation. He could never marry the girl Eunice now, he thought; it would not be fair to her, or to him. Suppose she never knew! He smiled contemptuously at the thought.

"Get thee behind me, Satan," he said to the little dog that crouched at his feet, watching him with eyes that never left his face. He bent down and patted the mongrel, who turned on his back with uplifted paws. "You and I have no particular reason to love Digby Groat, old fellow," he said, for this was the dog he had rescued from Digby's dissecting table, "and if he harms a hair of her head, he will be sorry he was ever born."

He began his search in the morning, almost as soon as the shipping offices opened. One by one they blasted his hopes, and he scarcely dared make his last call, which was at the office of the African Coastwise Line.

"And I don't think it is much use going to them," said the clerk at the last but one of his calls. "They don't sail from London, they are a Liverpool firm, and all their packets sail direct from the Mersey. I don't think we have ever had a Coastwise boat in the London docks. I happen to know," he explained, "because I was in the Customs before I came to this firm."

The Coastwise Line was an old-fashioned firm and occupied an old-fashioned office in a part of London which seemed to be untouched by the passing improve-

ments of the age. It was one of those firms which have never succumbed to the blandishments of the Company Promoter, and the two senior partners of the firm, old gentlemen who had the appearance of being dignitaries of the Church, were seated on either side of a big partners' table.

Jim was received with old-world courtesy and a chair was placed for him by a porter almost as ancient as the proprietors of the African Coastwise Line.

Both the gentlemen listened to his requirements in silence.

"I don't think we have ever had a ship pass through the Straits of Dover," said one, shaking his head. "We were originally a Liverpool firm, and though the offices have always been in London, Liverpool is our headquarters."

"And Avonmouth," murmured his partner.

"And Avonmouth, of course," the elder of the two acknowledged the correction with a slight inclination of his head.

"Then there is no reason why I should trouble you, gentlemen," said Jim with a heavy heart.

"It is no trouble, I assure you," said the partner, "but to make absolutely sure we will get our sailings for—June, 1901, I think you said?"

He rang a bell and to the middle-aged clerk, who looked so young, thought Jim, that he must be the office-boy, he made his request known. Presently the clerk came back with a big ledger which he laid on the partner's desk. He watched the gentleman as his well manicured finger ran carefully down the pages and suddenly stopped.

"Why, of course," he said looking up, "do you remember we took over a Union African trip when they were hard pressed with transport work?"

"To be sure," said his partner. "It was the *Battledore* we sent out, she went from Tilbury. The only ship of ours that has ever sailed from Thames River."

"What date did it sail?" asked Jim eagerly.

"It sailed with the tide, which was apparently about eight o'clock in the morning of the 21st of June. Let me see," said the partner rising and going to a big chart that hung on the wall, "that would bring her up to the North Foreland Light at about twelve o'clock. What time did the accident occur?"

"At noon," said Jim huskily, and the partners looked at one another.

"I don't remember anything peculiar being reported on that voyage," said the senior slowly.

"You were in Switzerland at the time," said the other, "and so was I. Mr. Mansar was in charge."

"Is Mr. Mansar here?" asked Jim eagerly.

"He is dead," said the partner gently. "Yes, poor Mr. Mansar is dead. He died at a comparatively early age of sixty-three, a very amiable man, who played the piano remarkably well."

"The violin," murmured his partner.

Jim was not interested in the musical accomplishments of the deceased Mr. Mansar.

"Is there no way of finding out what happened on that voyage?"

It was the second of the partners who spoke.

"We can produce the log book of the *Battledore*."

"I hope we can," corrected the other. "The *Battle-*

*dore* was sunk during the Great War, torpedoed off the Needles, but Captain Pinnings, who was in command of her at the time, is alive and hearty."

"And his log book?" asked Jim.

"That we must investigate. We keep all log books at the Liverpool office, and I will write to-night to ask our managing clerk to send the book down, if it is in his possession."

"This is very urgent," said Jim earnestly. "You have been so kind that I would not press you if it were not a matter of the greatest importance. Would it be possible for me to go to Liverpool and see the log?"

"I think I can save you that trouble," said the elder of the two, whose names Jim never knew. "Mr. Harry is coming down to London to-morrow, isn't he?"

His friend nodded.

"Well, he can bring the book, if it exists. I will tell the clerk to telephone to Liverpool to that effect," and with this Jim had to content himself, though it meant another twenty-four hours' delay.

He reported progress to the lawyer, when he determined upon making a bold move. His first business was the protection of Eunice, and although he did not imagine that any immediate danger threatened her, she must be got out of 409, Grosvenor Square at the earliest opportunity.

If Lady Mary were only in London, how simple it would be! As it was, he had neither the authority to command nor the influence to request.

He drove up to 409, Grosvenor Square and was immediately shown into Digby Groat's study.

"How do you do, Mr. Steele," said that bland gentle-

man. "Take a seat, will you? It is much more comfortable than hiding under the table," he added, and Jim smiled.

"Now what can I do for you?"

"I want to see Miss Weldon," said Jim.

"I believe the lady is out; but I will enquire."

He rang the bell and immediately a servant answered the summons.

"Will you ask Miss Weldon to step down here?"

"It is not necessary that I should see her here," said Jim.

"Don't worry," smiled Digby. "I will make my exit at the proper moment."

The maid returned, however, with the news that the lady had gone out.

"Very well," said Jim taking up his hat, and with a smile as bland as his unwilling host's, "I will wait outside until she comes in."

"Admirable persistence!" murmured Digby. "Perhaps I can find her."

He went out and returned again in a few minutes with Eunice.

"The maid was quite misinformed," he said urbanely. "Miss Weldon had not gone out."

He favored her with a little bow and left the room closing the door behind him.

Eunice stood with her hands behind her, looking at the man on whom her hopes and thoughts had centered, and about whose conduct such a storm was still raging in her bosom.

"You want to see me, Mr. Steele?"

Her attitude shook his self-possession and drove

from his mind all the carefully reasoned arguments he had prepared.

"I want you to leave this house, Eunice," he said.

"Have you a new reason?" she asked, though she hated herself for the sarcasm.

"I have the best of reasons," he said doggedly. "I am satisfied that you are the daughter of Lady Mary Danton."

Again she smiled.

"I think you've used that argument before, haven't you?"

"Listen, Eunice, I beg of you," he pleaded. "I can prove that you are Lady Mary's daughter. That scar on your wrist was made by Digby Groat when you were a baby. And there is no Eunice Weldon. We have proved that she died in Cape Town a year after you were born."

She regarded him steadily, and his heart sank.

"That is very romantic," she said, "and have you anything further to say?"

"Nothing, except the lady you saw in my room was your mother."

Her eyes opened wider and then he saw a little smile come and go like a ray of winter sunshine on her lips.

"Really, Jim," she said, "you should write stories. And if it interests you, I might tell you that I am leaving this house in a few days. I am going back to my old employment. I don't want you to explain who the woman was who has the misfortune to be without a telephone and the good fortune to have the key of your flat," she said, her anger swamping the pity she had for him. "I only want to tell you that

you have shaken my faith in men more than Digby Groat or any other man could have done. You have hurt me beyond forgiveness."

For a moment her voice quivered and then with an effort of will she pulled herself together and walked to the door. "Good-by, Jim," she said, and was gone.

He stood as she had left him, stunned, unable to believe his ears. Her scorn struck him like a whip, the injustice of her view of him deprived him of speech.

For a second a blinding wave of anger drowned all other emotions, but this passed. He could have gone now, for there was no hope of seeing her again and explaining even if he had been willing to offer any explanation.

But he stayed on. He was anxious to meet Digby Groat and find from his attitude what part he had played in forming the girl's mind. The humor of the situation struck him and he laughed though his laughter was filtered through a pain that was so nearly physical that he could not distinguish the one from the other.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

**T**HE end was coming. Digby Groat took too sane a view of things to mistake the signs.

For two years he had been in negotiation with a land agent in San Paulo and had practically completed the purchase of an estate. By subterranean methods he had skillfully disguised the identity of the purchaser, and on that magnificent ranch he intended to spend a not unpleasant life. It might not come to a question of flight, in which case the ranch would be a diversion from the humdrum life of England. And more than ever was he determined that Eunice Weldon should accompany him, and share, at any rate, a year of his life. Afterwards—he shrugged his shoulders. Women had come into his life before, had at first fascinated, and then bored him, and had disappeared from his ken. Probably Eunice would go the same way, though he could not contemplate the possibility at the moment.

\* \* \* \* \*

The hours of the morning passed all too slowly for Jim Steele. The partner brothers had said that their "Mr. Harry" would arrive at one o'clock and punctually at that hour Jim was waiting in the outer office.

Mr. Harry's train, however, must have been late. It was nearer two when he came in, followed by a porter carrying a thick parcel under his arm. Presently the porter came out.

"Will you go in, sir," he said respectfully, and Jim stepped quickly into the room.

Mr. Harry, whom he had thought of as a boy, was a grave man of fifty and apparently the younger brother of the eldest partner.

"We have found the log of the *Battledore*," said that gentleman, "but I have forgotten the date."

"June 21st," said Jim.

The log lay open upon the big table, and its presence brought an atmosphere of romance into this quiet orderly office.

"Here we are," said the partner. "*Battledore* left Tilbury 9 A. M. on the tide. Wind east by south-east, sea smooth, hazy." He ran his fingers down. "This is what I think you want."

For Jim it was a moment of intense drama. The partner was reading some preliminary and suddenly he came to the entry which was to make all the difference in the world to the woman whom Jim loved dearer than life.

"'Heavy fog, speed reduced at 11.50 to half. Reduced to quarter speed at 12.1. Bosun reported that we had run down small rowing boat and that he had seen two persons in the water. Able seaman Grant went overboard and rescued child. The second person was not found. Speed increased, endeavored to speak Dungeness, but weather too hazy for flag signals'—this was before the days of wireless, you must understand, Mr. Steele."

Jim nodded.

"'Sex of child discovered, girl, apparent age a few months. Child handed to stewardess'"

Entry followed entry, but there was no further reference to the child until he came to Funchal.

"In the Island of Madeira," he explained. "'Arrived Funchal 6 A. M. Reported recovery of child to British Consul, who said he would cable to London.'"

The next entry was:

"Dakka—a port on the West Coast of Africa and French protectorate," said the partner. "'Received cable from British Consul at Funchal saying no loss of child reported to London police.'"

There was no other entry which affected Jim until one on the third day before the ship arrived at Cape Town.

"'Mr. Weldon, a Cape Town resident who is traveling with his wife for her health, has offered to adopt the child picked up by us on June 21st, having recently lost one of his own. Mr. Weldon being known to the Captain and vouched for by Canon Jesson——' this was apparently a fellow-passenger of his," explained the partner—"the child was handed to his care, on condition that the matter was reported to the authorities in Cape Town.'"

A full description of the size, weight, and coloring of the little waif followed, and against the query "Marks on Body" were the words "Scar on right wrist, doctor thinks the result of a recent burn."

Jim drew a long sigh.

"I cannot tell you, gentlemen, how grateful I am to you. You have righted a great wrong and have earned the gratitude of the child who is now a woman."

"Do you think that this is the young lady?"

Jim nodded.

"I am sure," he said quietly. "The log of Captain Pinnings supplies the missing link of evidence. We may have to ask you to produce this log in court, but I hope that the claim of our client will not be disputed."

He walked down Threadneedle Street, treading on air, and the fact that while he had gained for Eunice—her name was Dorothy now, but she would be always Eunice to him—a fortune, he had lost the greatest fortune that could be bestowed upon a man, did not disturb his joy.

He had made a rough copy of the log and with this in his hand he drove to Septimus Salter's office and without a word laid the extracts before him.

Mr. Salter read and as he read his eyes lit up.

"The whole thing is remarkably clear," he said, "the log proves the identity of Lady Mary's daughter. Your investigations are practically complete?"

"Not yet, sir," smiled Jim. "We have first to displace Jane Groat and her son," he hesitated, "and we must persuade Miss Danton to leave that house."

"In that case," said the lawyer rising, "I think an older man's advice will be more acceptable than yours, my boy, and I'll go with you."

A new servant opened the door and almost at the sound of the knock, Digby came out of his study, urbane and as perfectly groomed as usual.

"I want to see Miss Weldon," said the lawyer and Digby stiffened at the sight of him. He would have felt more uncomfortable if he had known what was in Salter's mind.

Digby was looking at him straightly; his whole attitude, thought Jim, was one of tense anxiety.

"I am sorry you cannot see Miss Weldon," he said speaking slowly. "She left with my mother by an early Continental train and at this moment I should imagine, is somewhere in the region of Paris."

"That is a damned lie!" said Jim Steele calmly.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THEY stood confronting one another, two men with murder in their hearts.

"It is a lie!" repeated Jim. "Miss Weldon is either here or she has been taken to that hell house of yours in Somerset!"

For the time being Digby Groat was less concerned by Jim's vehement insult, than he was by the presence of the lawyer.

"So you lend yourself to this blackguardly outrage," he sneered. "I should have thought a man of your experience would have refused to have been made a dupe of by this fellow. Anyway," he turned to Jim, "Miss Weldon wants no more to do with you. She has told me about that quarrel and really, Steele, you have behaved very badly."

The man was lying. Jim did not think twice about that. Eunice would never have made a confidant of him.

"What is your interest in Miss Weldon?" asked Digby addressing the lawyer.

"Outside of a human interest, none," said old Salter and Jim was staggered.

"But——" he began.

"I think we had better go, Steele," Salter interrupted him with a warning glance.

They were some distance from the house before Jim spoke.

"But why didn't you tell him, Mr. Salter, that Eunice was the heiress of the Danton fortune?"

Salter looked at him with an odd queer expression in his bright blue eyes.

"Suppose all you fear has happened," he said gently. "Suppose this man is the villain that we both believe he is, and the girl is in his power. What would be the consequence of my telling him that Eunice Weldon was in a position to strip him of every penny he possesses, to turn him out of his house and reduce him to penury?"

Jim bit his lip.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said humbly, "I'm an impetuous fool."

"So long as Digby Groat does not know that Eunice threatens his position she is comparatively safe. At any rate, her life is safe. Once we let him learn all that we know, she is doomed."

Jim nodded.

"Do you think, then, that she is in real danger?" he asked.

"I am certain that Mr. Digby Groat would not hesitate at murder to serve his ends," said the lawyer gruffly.

They did not speak again until they were in the office in Marlborough Street, and then Jim threw himself down in a chair with a groan and covered his face with his hands.

"It seems as if we are powerless," he said bitterly, and then looking up, "Surely Mr. Salter, the law is greater than Digby Groat. Are there no processes we can set in motion to pull him down?"

It was very seldom old Septimus Salter smoked in

his office, but this was an occasion for an extraordinary happening. He took from a cabinet an old meerschau pipe and polishing it on the sleeve of his broadcloth coat, slowly filled it, packing down the straggling strands of tobacco which overflowed the pipe, with exasperating calmness.

"The law, my boy, is greater than Digby Groat, and greater than you or I. Sometimes ignorant people laugh at it, sometimes they sneer at it, generally they curse it. But there it is, the old dilatory machinery, grinding slow and grinding exceedingly small. It is not confined to the issue of search warrants, of arrest and judgments. It has a thousand weapons to strike at the cheat and the villain and, by God, every one of those weapons shall be employed against Digby Groat!"

Jim sprang to his feet and gripped the old man's hand.

"And if the law cannot touch him," he said, "I will make a law of these two hands and strangle the life out of him."

Mr. Salter looked at him admiringly, but a little amused.

"In which case, my dear Steele," he said drily, "the law will take you in her two hands and strangle the life out of you and it doesn't seem worth while, when a few little pieces of paper will probably bring about as effective a result as your willful murder of this damnable scoundrel."

Immediately Jim began his enquiries. To his surprise he learnt that the party had actually been driven to Victoria Station. It consisted of Eunice and old Mrs. Groat. Moreover, two tickets for Paris had been



taken by Digby and two seats reserved in the first-class carriages. It was through these Pullman reservations that the names of Eunice and the old woman were easy to trace, as Digby Groat intended they should be.

Whether they had left by the train, he could not discover.

He returned to the lawyer and reported progress.

"The fact that Jane Groat has gone does not prove that our client has also gone," said the lawyer sensibly.

"Our client?" said Jim puzzled.

"Our client," repeated Septimus Salter with a smile.

"Do not forget that Miss Danton is our client and until she authorizes me to hand her interests elsewhere——"

"Mr. Salter," interrupted Jim, "when was the Danton estate handed over to Bennetts?"

"This morning," was the staggering reply, though Mr. Salter did not seem particularly depressed.

"Good heavens," gasped Jim, "then the estate is in Digby Groat's hands?"

The lawyer nodded.

"For a while," he said, "but don't let that worry you at all. You get along with your search. Have you heard from Lady Mary?"

"Who, sir?" said Jim, again staggered.

"Lady Mary Danton," said the lawyer, enjoying his surprise. "Your mysterious woman in black. Obviously it was Lady Mary. I never had any doubt of it, but when I learnt about the Blue Hand, I was certain. You see, my boy," he said with a twinkle in his eyes, "I have been making enquiries in a direction which you have neglected."

"What does the Blue Hand mean?" asked Jim.

"Lady Mary will tell you one of these days, and

until she does, I do not feel at liberty to take you into my confidence. Have you ever been to a dyer's, Steele?"

"A dyer's, sir, yes, I've been to a dye works, if that is what you mean."

"Have you ever seen the hands of the women who use indigo?"

"Do you suggest that when she disappeared she went to a dye works?" said Jim incredulously.

"She will tell you," replied the lawyer, and with that he had to be content.

The work was now too serious and the strings were too widely distributed to carry on alone. Salter enlisted the services of two ex-officers of the Metropolitan Police who had established a detective agency, and at a conference that afternoon the whole of the story, as far as it was known, was revealed to Jim's new helpers, ex-Inspector Holder and ex-Sergeant Field.

That afternoon Digby Groat, looking impatiently out of the window, saw a bearded man strolling casually along the garden side of the square, a pipe in his mouth, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of nature and the architectural beauty of Grosvenor Square. He did not pay as much attention to the lounge as he might have done, had not his scrutiny been interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Bennett, an angular, sandy-haired Scotsman, who was not particularly enamored of his new employer.

"Well, Mr. Bennett, has old Salter handed over all the documents?"

"Yes, sir," said Bennett, "every one."

"You are sure he has not been up to any trickery?" Mr. Bennett regarded him coldly.

"Mr. Septimus Salter, sir," he said quietly, "is an eminent lawyer, whose name is respected wherever it is mentioned. Great lawyers do not indulge in trickery."

"Well, you needn't get offended. Good Lord, you don't suppose he feels friendly towards you, do you?"

"What he feels to me, sir," said Mr. Bennett, his strong northern accent betraying his annoyance, "is a matter of complete indifference. It is what I think of him that we are discussing. The leases of the Lake-side Property have been prepared for transfer. You are not losing much time, Mr. Groat."

"No," said Digby, after a moment's thought. "The fact is, the people in the syndicate which is purchasing this property are very anxious to take possession. What is the earliest you can transfer?"

"To-morrow," was the reply. "I suppose," he hesitated. "I suppose there is no question of the original heiress of the will—Dorothy Danton I think her name is—turning up unexpectedly at the last moment?"

Digby smiled.

"Dorothy Danton, as you call her, has been food for the fishes these twenty years," he said. "Don't you worry your head about her."

"Very good," said Bennett, producing a number of papers from a black leather portfolio. "Your signature will be required on four of these, and the signature of your mother on the fifth."

Digby frowned.

"My mother? I thought it was unnecessary that she should sign anything. I have her Power of Attorney."

"Unfortunately the Power of Attorney is not suffi-

ciently comprehensive to allow you to sign away certain royalty rights which descend to her through her father. They are not very valuable," said the lawyer, "but they give her lien upon Kennett Hall, and in these circumstances, I think you had better not depend upon the Power of Attorney in case there is any dispute. Mr. Salter is a very shrewd man, and when the particulars of this transaction are brought to his notice I think it is very likely that, feeling his responsibility as Mr. Danton's late lawyer, he will enter a caveat."

"What is a caveat?"

"Literally," said Mr. Bennett, "a caveat emptor means 'let the purchaser beware,' and if a caveat is entered, your syndicate would not dare take the risk of paying you for the property, even though the caveat had no effect upon the estate which were transferred by virtue of your Power of Attorney."

Digby tugged at his little mustache and stared out of the window for a long time.

"All right, I'll get her signature."

"She is in Paris, I understand."

Digby shot a glance at him.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I had to call at Mr. Salter's office to-day," he said, "to verify and agree to the list of securities which he handed me, and he mentioned the matter in passing."

Digby growled something under his breath.

"Is it necessary that you should see Salter at all?" he asked with asperity.

"It is necessary that I should conduct my own business in my own way," said Mr. Bennett with that acid smile of his.

Digby shot an angry glance at him and resolved that

as soon as the business was completed, he would have little use for this uncompromising Scotsman. He hated the law and he hated lawyers, and he had been under the impression that Messrs. Bennett would be so overwhelmed with joy at the prospect of administering his estate, that they would agree to any suggestion he made. He had yet to learn that the complacent lawyer is a figure of fiction and if he is found at all, it is in the character of the seedy broken-down old solicitor who hangs about Police Courts and who interviews his clients in the bar parlor of the nearest public house.

"Very good," he said, "give me the paper. I will get her to sign it."

"Will you go to Paris?"

"Yes," said Digby. "I'll send it across by—er—  
aeroplane."

The lawyer gathered up the papers and thrust them back into the wallet.

"Then I will see you at twelve o'clock to-morrow at the office of the Northern Land Syndicate."

Digby nodded.

"Oh, by the way, Bennett," he called the lawyer back, "I wish you to put this house in the market. I shall be spending a great deal of my time abroad and I have no use for this costly property. I want a quick sale, by the way."

"A quick sale is a bad sale for the seller," quoth the lawyer, "but I'll do what I can for you, Mr. Groat. Do you want to dispose of the furniture?"

Digby nodded.

"And you have another house in the country?"

"That is not for sale," said Digby shortly.

When the lawyer had gone he went up to his

room and changed, taking his time over his toilet.

"Now," he said as he drew on his gloves with a quiet smile, "I have to induce Eunice to be a good girl!"

## CHAPTER THIRTY

**D**IGBY GROAT made an unexpected journey west.

A good general, even in the hour of his victory, prepares the way for retreat, and the possibility of Kennett Hall had long appealed to Digby as a likely refuge in a case of emergency.

Kennett Hall was one of the estates which his mother had inherited and which, owing to his failure to secure her signature, had not been prepared for transfer to the land syndicate. It had been the home of the Danton family for one hundred and forty years. A rambling, neglected house, standing in a big and gloomy park, it had been untenanted almost as long as Digby could remember.

He had sent his car down in the early morning, but he himself had gone by train. He disliked long motor journeys, and though he intended coming back by road, he preferred the quietude and smooth progress of the morning railway journey.

The car, covered with dust, was waiting for him at the railway station, and the few officials who constituted the station staff, watched him go out of the gate without evidence of enthusiasm.

"That's Groat who owns Kennett Hall, isn't it?" said the porter to the aged station master.

"That's him," was the reply. "It was a bad day for this country when that property came into old

Jane Groat's hands. A bad woman that, if ever there was one."

Unconscious of the criticisms of his mother, Digby was bowling up the hill road leading to the gates of Kennett Hall. The gates themselves were magnificent specimens of seventeenth century ironwork, but the lodges on either side were those ugly stuccoed huts with which the mid-Victorian architect "embellished" the estates of the great. They had not been occupied for twenty years, and bore the appearance of their neglect. The little gardens which once had flowered so cheerfully before the speckless windows, were over-run by weeds, and the gravel drive, seen through the gates, was almost indistinguishable from the grass-land on either side.

The caretaker came running down the drive to unlock the gates. He was an ill-favored man of fifty with a perpetual scowl which even the presence of his master could not wholly eradicate.

"Has anybody been here, Masters?" asked Digby.

"No, sir," said the man, "except the flying gentleman. He came this morning. What a wonderful thing flying is, sir! The way he came down in the Home Park was wonderful to see."

"Get on the step with the driver," said Digby curtly, who was not interested in his servitor's views of flying.

The car drove through a long avenue of elms and turned to breast a treeless slope that led up to the lower terrace. All the beauty and loveliness of Somerset in which it stood could not save Kennett Hall from the reproach of dreariness. Its parapets were crumbled by the wind and rain of long forgotten seasons, and its face was scarred and stained with thirty winters'



rains. Its black and dusty windows seemed to leer upon the fresh clean beauty of the world, as though in pride of its sheer ugliness.

For twenty years no painter's brush had touched the drab and ugly woodwork: and the weeds grew high where roses used to bloom. Three great white seats of marble, that were placed against the crumbling terrace balustrade, were green with drippings from the neglected trees; the terrace floor was broken and the rags and tatters of dead seasons spread their moldering litter of leaves and twigs and moss upon the marble walk where stately dames had trodden in those brave days when Kennett Hall was a name to inspire awe.

Digby was not depressed by his view of the property. He had seen it before, and at one time had thought of pulling it down and erecting a modern building for his own comfort.

The man he had called Masters unlocked the big door and ushered him into the house.

The neglect was here apparent. As he stepped into the big bleak entrance he heard the scurry and scamper of tiny feet and smiled.

"You've got some rats here?"

"Rats?" said Masters in a tone of resignation, "there's a colony of them, sir. It is as much as I can do to keep them out of my quarters, but there's nothing in the east wing," he hastened to add. "I had a couple of terriers and ferrets here for a month keeping them down, and they're all on this side of the house." He jerked his head to the right.

"Is the flying gentleman here?"

"He's having breakfast, sir, at this minute."

Digby followed the caretaker down a long gloomy

passage on the ground floor, and passed through the door that the man opened.

The bearded Villa nodded with a humorous glint in his eye, as Digby entered. From his appearance and dress, he had evidently arrived by aeroplane.

"Well, you got here," said Digby, glancing at the huge meal which had been put before the man.

"I got here," said Villa with an extravagant flourish of his knife. "But only by the favor of the gods. I do not like these scout machines: you must get Bronson to pilot it back."

Digby nodded, and pulling out a rickety chair, sat down.

"I have given instructions for Bronson to come here: he will arrive to-night," he said.

"Good," muttered the man continuing his meal.

Masters had gone, and Villa was listening to the receding sound of his footsteps upon the uncovered boards, before he asked:

"What is the idea of this, governor? You are not changing headquarters?"

"I don't know," replied Digby shortly, "but the Seaford aerodrome is under observation. At least, Steele knows, or guesses, all about it. I have decided to hire some commercial pilots to give an appearance of genuine business to the company."

Villa whistled.

"This place is no use to you, governor," he said shaking his head. "They'd tumble to Kennett Hall—that's what you call it, isn't it?" He had an odd way of introducing slang words into his tongue, for he spoke in Spanish, and Digby smiled at "tumble."

"You're becoming quite an expert in the English language, Villa."

"But why are you coming here?" persisted the other. "This could only be a temporary headquarters. Is the game slipping?" he asked suddenly.

Digby nodded.

"It may come to a case of *sauve qui peut*," he said, "though I hope it will not. Everything depends upon——" He did not finish his sentence, but asked abruptly: "How far is the sea from here?"

"Not a great distance," was the reply. "I traveled at six thousand feet and I could see the Bristol Channel quite distinctly."

Digby was stroking his chin, looking thoughtfully at the table.

"I can trust you, Villa," he said, "so I tell you now, much as you dislike these fast machines, you've got to hold yourself in readiness to pilot me to safety. Again, I say that I do not think it will come to flight, but we must be prepared. In the meantime, I have a commission for you," he said. "It was not only to bring the machine that I arranged for you to come to this place."

Villa had guessed that.

"There is a man in Deauville to whom you have probably seen references in the newspapers, a man named Maxilla. He is a rich coffee planter of Brazil."

"The gambler?" said the other in surprise, and Digby nodded.

"I happen to know that Maxilla has had a very bad time; he lost nearly twenty million francs in one week, and that doesn't represent all his losses. He has been

gambling at Aix and at San Sebastian, and I should think he is in a pretty desperate position."

"But he wouldn't be broke," said Villa shaking his head. "I know the man you mean. Why, he's as rich as Croesus! I saw his yacht when you sent me to Havre. A wonderful ship, worth a quarter of a million. He has hundreds of square miles of coffee plantations in Brazil——"

"I know all about that," said Digby impatiently. "The point is, that for a moment he is very short of money. Now, do not ask me any questions, Villa: accept my word."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the man.

"Go to Deauville, take your slow machine and fly there: see Maxilla—you speak Portuguese?"

Villa nodded.

"Like a native," he said. "I lived in Lisbon——"

"Never mind where you lived," interrupted Digby unpleasantly. "You will see Maxilla, and if, as I believe, he is short of money, offer him a hundred thousand pounds for his yacht. He may want double that, and you must be prepared to pay it. Maxilla hasn't the best of reputations, and probably his crew—who are all Brazilians by the way—will be glad to sail under another flag. If you can effect the purchase, send me a wire, and order the boat to be brought round to the Bristol Channel to be coaled."

"It is an oil running ship," said Villa.

"Well, it must take on supplies of oil and provisions for a month's voyage. The captain will come straight to me in London to receive his instructions. I daresay one of his officers can bring the boat across. Now is that clear to you?"

"Everything is clear to me, my friend," said Villa blandly, "except two things. To buy a yacht I must have money."

"That I will give you before you go."

"Secondly," said Villa, putting the stump of his forefinger in his palm, "where does poor August Villa come into this?"

"You get away as well," said Digby.

"I see," said Villa.

"Maxilla must not know that I am the purchaser under any circumstances," Digby went on. "You may either be buying the boat for yourself in your capacity as a rich Cuban planter, or you may be buying it for an unknown friend. I will arrange to keep the captain and the crew quiet as soon as I am on board. You leave for Deauville to-night."

He had other preparations to make. Masters received an order to prepare two small rooms and to arrange for beds and bedding to be erected, and the instructions filled him with consternation.

"Don't argue with me," said Digby angrily. "Go into Bristol, into any town, buy the beds and bring them out in a car. I don't care what it costs. And get a square of carpet for the floor."

He tossed a bundle of notes into the man's hand, and Masters, who had never seen so much money in his life, nearly dropped them in sheer amazement.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

**D**IGBY GROAT returned to town by car and reached Grosvenor Square in time for dinner. He had a hasty meal and then went up to his room and changed.

He passed the room that Eunice occupied and found Jackson sitting on a chair before the door.

"She's all right," said the man grinning. "I've shuttered and padlocked the windows and I've told her that if she doesn't want me to make friendly calls she has to behave."

Digby nodded.

"And my mother—you gave her the little box?"

Again Jackson grinned.

"And she's happy," he said. "I never dreamt she was a dope, Mr. Groat——"

"There is no need for you to dream anything," said Digby sharply.

He had a call to make. Lady Waltham was giving a dance that night, and there would be present two members of the syndicate whom he was to meet on the following morning. One of these drew him aside during the progress of the dance.

"I suppose those transfers are quite in order for to-morrow," he said.

Digby nodded.

"Some of my people are curious to know why you want cash," he said looking at Digby with a smile.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"You seem to forget, my dear man," he said suavely, "that I am merely an agent in these matters, and that I am acting for my rather eccentric mother, God bless her!"

"That is the explanation which had occurred to me," said the financier. "The papers will be in order, of course? I seem to remember you saying that there was another paper which had to be signed by your mother."

Digby remembered with an unspoken oath that he had neglected to secure this signature. As soon as he could, he made his excuses and returned to Grosvenor Square.

His mother's room was locked, but she heard his gentle tap.

"Who is that?" she demanded in audible agitation.

"It is Digby."

"I will see you in the morning."

"I want to see you to-night," interrupted Digby sharply. "Open the door."

It was some time before she obeyed. She was in her dressing gown, and her yellow face was gray with fear.

"I am sorry to disturb you, mother," said Digby closing the door behind him, "but I have a document which must be signed to-night."

"I gave you everything you wanted," she said tremulously, "didn't I, dear? Everything you wanted, my boy?"

She had not the remotest idea that he was disposing of her property.

"Couldn't I sign it in the morning?" she pleaded. "My hand is so shaky."

"Sign it now," he almost shouted, and she obeyed.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Northern Land Syndicate was but one branch of a great finance corporation, and had been called into existence to acquire the Danton properties.

In a large, handsomely furnished board room, members of the syndicate were waiting. Lord Waltham was one, Hugo Vindt, the bluff, good-natured Jewish financier, whose fingers were in most of the business pies, was the second, and Felix Strathellan, that debonair man-about-town, was the important third—for he was one of the shrewdest land speculators in the kingdom.

A fourth member of the party was presently shown in in the person of the Scotch lawyer, Bennett, who carried under his arm a black portfolio, which he laid on the table.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said shortly. Millionaires' syndicates had long failed to impress him.

"Good morning, Bennett," said his lordship. "Have you seen your client this morning?"

Mr. Bennett made a wry face as he unstrapped the portfolio.

"No, my lord, I have not," he said, and suggested by his tone that he was not at all displeased that he had missed a morning interview with Digby Groat.

"A queer fellow is Groat," said Vindt with a laugh. "He is not a business man, and yet he has curiously keen methods. I should never have guessed he was an Englishman: he looks more like a Latin, don't you think, Lord Waltham?"

His lordship nodded.

"A queer family, the Groats," he said. "I wonder



how many of you fellows know that his mother is a kleptomaniac?"

"Good heavens," said Strathellan in amazement, "you don't mean that?"

His lordship nodded.

"She's quite a rum old lady now," he said, "though there was a time when she was as handsome a woman as there was in town. She used to visit us a lot, and invariably we discovered, when she had gone, that some little trinket, very often a perfectly worthless trifle, but on one occasion a rather valuable bracelet belonging to my daughter, had disappeared with her. Until I realized the true condition of affairs it used to worry me, but the moment I spoke to Groat, the property was restored, and we came to expect this evidence of her eccentricity. She's a lucky woman," he added.

"I wouldn't say that with a son like Digby," smiled Strathellan, who was drawing figures idly on his blotting pad.

"Nevertheless, she's lucky," persisted his lordship. "If that child of the Dantons hadn't been killed, the Groats would have been as poor as church mice."

"Did you ever meet Lady Mary, my lord?" asked Vindt.

Lord Waltham nodded.

"I met Lady Mary and the baby," he said quietly, "I used to be on dining terms with the Dantons. And a beautiful little baby she was."

"What baby is this?" asked a voice.

Digby Groat had come in in his noiseless fashion, and closed the door of the board room softly behind him. The question was the first intimation they had

of his presence, all except Lord Waltham, who out of the corner of his eye, had seen his entrance.

"We were talking about Lady Mary's baby, your cousin."

Digby Groat smiled contemptuously.

"It will not profit us very much to discuss her," he said.

"Do you remember her at all, Groat?" asked Waltham.

"Dimly," said Digby with a careless shrug. "I'm not frightfully keen on babies. I have a faint recollection that she was once staying in our house, and I associate her with prodigious howling! Is everything all right, Bennett?"

Bennett nodded.

"Here is the paper you asked for." Digby took it from his pocket and laid it before the lawyer, who unfolded it leisurely and read it with exasperating slowness.

"That is in order," he said. "Now, gentlemen, we will get to business."

Such of them as were not already seated about the table drew up their chairs.

"Your insistence upon having the money in cash has been rather a nuisance, Groat," said Lord Waltham, picking up a tin box from the floor and opening it. "I hate to have a lot of money in the office; it has meant the employment of two special watchmen."

"I will pay," said Digby good-humoredly, watching with greedy eyes as bundle after bundle of notes was laid upon the table.

The lawyer twisted round the paper and offered him a pen.

"You will sign here, Mr. Groat," he said.

At that moment Vindt turned his head to the clerk who had just entered.

"For me?" he said, indicating the letter in the man's hand.

"No, sir, for Mr. Bennett."

Bennett took the note, looked at the name embossed upon the flap, and frowned.

"From Salter," he said, "and it is marked 'urgent and important.'"

"Let it wait until after we have finished the business," said Digby impatiently.

"You had better see what it is," replied the lawyer and took out a typewritten sheet of paper. He read it through carefully.

"What is it?" asked Digby.

"I'm afraid this sale cannot go through," answered the lawyer slowly. "Salter has entered a *caveat* against the transfer of the property."

Livid with rage Digby sprang to his feet.

"What right has he?" he demanded savagely. "He is no longer my lawyer: he has no right to act. Who authorized him?"

The lawyer had a queer expression on his face.

"This caveat," he said speaking deliberately, "has been entered by Salter on behalf of Dorothy Danton, who, according to the letter, is still alive."

There was a painful silence, which the voice of Vindt broke.

"So that settles the transfer," he said. "We cannot go on with this business, you understand, Groat?"

"But I insist on the transfer going through," cried Digby violently. "The whole thing is a plot got up

by that dithering old fool, Salter. Everybody knows that Dorothy Danton is dead! She has been dead for twenty years."

"Nevertheless," said Lord Waltham quietly, "we cannot move in face of the caveat. Without being a legal instrument, it places upon the purchasers of the property the fullest responsibility for their purchase."

"But I will sign the transfer," said Digby vehemently.

Lord Waltham shook his head.

"It would not matter if you signed twenty transfers," he said. "If we paid you the money for this property and it proved to be the property of Miss Danton, as undoubtedly it would prove, if she were alive, we and only we, would be responsible. We should have to surrender the property and look to you to refund us the money we had invested in the estate. No, no, Groat, if it is, as you say, a bluff on the part of Salter—and upon my word, I cannot imagine a man of Salter's position, age and experience putting up empty bluff—then we can have a meeting on another day and the deal can go through. We are very eager to acquire these properties."

There was a murmur of agreement from both Strathellan and Vindt.

"But at present, as matters stand, we can do nothing and you as a business man must recognize our helplessness in the matter."

Digby was beside himself with fury as he saw the money being put back in the tin box.

"Very well," he said. His face was pallid and his suppressed rage shook him as with an ague. But he never lost sight of all the possible developments of the

lawyer's action. If he had taken so grave a step in respect to the property, he would take action in other directions and no time must be lost if he was to anticipate Salter's next move.

Without another word he turned on his heel and stalked down the stairs into the street. His car was waiting.

"To the Third National Bank," he said, as he flung himself into its luxurious interior.

He knew that at the Third National Bank was a sum nearly approaching a hundred thousand pounds which his parsimonious mother had accumulated during the period she had been in receipt of the revenues of the Danton estate. Viewing the matter as calmly as he could, he was forced to agree that Salter was not the man who would play tricks or employ the machinery of the law, unless he had behind him a very substantial backing of facts. Dorothy Danton! Where had she sprung from? Who was she? Digby cursed her long and heartily. At any rate, he thought, as his car stopped before the bank premises, he would be on the safe side and get his hands on all the money which was lying loose.

He wished now that when he had sent Villa to Deauville he had taken his mother's money for the purchase of the gambler's yacht. Instead of that he had drawn upon the enormous funds of the Thirteen.

He was shown into the manager's office, and he thought that that gentleman greeted him a little coldly.

"Good morning, Mr. Stevens, I have come to draw out the greater part of my mother's balance and I thought I would see you first."

"I'm glad you did, Mr. Groat," was the reply. "Will you sit down?" The manager was obviously ill at ease. "The fact is," he confessed. "I am not in a position to honor any cheques you draw upon this bank."

"What the devil do you mean?" demanded Digby.

"I am sorry," said the manager shrugging his shoulders, "but this morning I have been served with a notice that a caveat has been entered at the Probate office, preventing the operation of the Danton will in your mother's favor. I have already informed our head office and they are taking legal opinion, but as Mr. Salter threatens to obtain immediately an injunction unless we agree to comply, it would be madness on my part to let you touch a penny of your mother's account. Your own account, of course, you can draw upon."

Digby's own account contained a respectable sum, he remembered.

"Very well," he said after consideration. "Will you discover my balance and I will close the account."

He was cool now. This was not the moment to hammer his head against a brick wall. He needed to meet this cold-blooded old lawyer with cunning and foresight. Salter was diabolically wise in the law and had its processes at his finger-tips and he must go warily against the trained fighter or he would come to everlasting smash.

Fortunately, the account of the Thirteen was at another bank, and if the worst came to the worst—well, he could leave eleven of the Thirteen to make the best of things they could.

The manager returned presently and passed a slip

across the table, and a few minutes afterwards Digby came back to his car, his pockets bulging with bank notes.

A tall bearded man stood on the sidewalk as he came out and Digby gave him a cursory glance. Detective, he thought, and went cold. Were the police already stirring against him, or was this some private watcher of Salter's? He decided rightly that it was the latter.

When he got back to the house he found a telegram waiting. It was from Villa. It was short and satisfactory.

"Bought *Pealigo* hundred and twelve thousand pounds. Ship on its way to Avonmouth. Am bringing captain back by air. Calling Grosvenor nine o'clock."

The frown cleared away from his face as he read the telegram for the second time, and as he thought, a smile lit up his yellow face. He was thinking of Eunice. The position was not without its compensations.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

EUNICE was sitting in the shuttered room trying to read when Digby Groat came in. All the color left her face as she rose to meet him.

"Good evening, Miss Weldon," he said in his usual manner. "I hope you haven't been very bored."

"Will you please explain why I am kept here a prisoner?" she asked a little breathlessly. "You realize that you are committing a very serious crime——"

He laughed in her face.

"Well," he said almost jovially, "at any rate, Eunice, we can drop the mask. That is one blessed satisfaction! These polite little speeches are irksome to me as they are to you."

He took her hand in his.

"How cold you are, my dear," he said, "yet the room is warm!"

"When may I leave this house?" she asked in a low voice.

"Leave this house—leave me?" He threw the gloves he had stripped on to a chair and caught her by the shoulders. "When are *we* going? That is a better way of putting it. How lovely you are, Eunice!"

There was no disguise now. The mask was off, as he had said, and the ugliness of his black nature was written in his eyes.

Still she did not resist, standing stiffly erect like a figure of marble. Not even when he took her face in



both his hands and pressed his lips to hers, did she move. She seemed incapable. Something inside her had frozen and she could only stare at him.

"I want you, Eunice! I have wanted you all the time. I chose you out of all the women in the world to be mine. I have waited for you, longed for you, and now I have you! There is nobody here, Eunice, but you and me. Do you hear, darling?"

Then suddenly a cord snapped within her. With an effort of strength which surprised him she thrust him off, her eyes staring in horror as though she contemplated some loathsome crawling thing. That look inflamed him. He sprang forward, and as he did, the girl in the desperation of frenzy, struck at him; twice her open hand came across his face. He stepped back with a yell. Before he could reach her she had flown into the bath room and locked the door. For fully five minutes he stood, then he turned and walked slowly across to the dressing table, and surveyed his face in the big mirror.

"She struck me!" he said. He was as white as a sheet. Against his pale face the imprint of her hand showed lividly. "She struck me!" he said again wonderingly, and began to laugh.

For every blow, for every joint on every finger of the hand that struck the blow, she should have pain. Pain and terror. She should pray for death, she should crawl to him and clasp his feet in her agony. His breath came quicker and he wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.

He passed out, locking the door behind him. His hand was on the key when he heard a sound and looking along the corridor, saw the door of his mother's

room open and the old woman standing in the doorway.

"Digby," she said, and there was a vigor and command in her voice which made him frown. "I want you!" she said imperatively and in amazement he obeyed her.

She had gone back to her chair when he came into the room.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Shut the door and sit down."

He stared at her dumfounded. Not for years had she dared address him in that tone.

"What the devil do you mean by ordering me——" he began.

"Sit down," she said quietly, and then he understood.

"So, you old devil, the dope is in you!"

"Sit down, my love child," she sneered. "Sit down, Digby Estremeda! I want to speak to you."

His face went livid.

"You—you——" he gasped.

"Sit down. Tell me what you have done with my property."

He obeyed her slowly, looking at her as though he could not believe the evidence of his ears.

"What have you done with my property?" she asked again. "Like a fool I gave you a Power of Attorney. How have you employed it? Have you sold——" She was looking at him keenly.

He was surprised into telling the truth.

"They have put an embargo—or some such rubbish—on the sale."

She nodded.

"I hoped they would," she said. "I hoped they would!"

"You hoped they would?" he roared, getting up.

Her imperious hand waved him down again. He passed his hand over his eyes like a man in a dream. She was issuing orders; this old woman whom he had dominated for years, and he was obeying meekly! He had given her the morphine to quiet her, and it had made her his master.

"Why did they stop the sale?"

"Because that old lunatic Salter swears that the girl is still alive—Dorothy Danton, the baby who was drowned at Margate!"

He saw a slow smile on her lined face and wondered what was amusing her.

"She is alive!" she said.

He could only glare at her in speechless amazement.

"Dorothy Danton alive?" he said. "You're mad, you old fool! She's gone beyond recall—dead—dead these twenty years!"

"And what brought her back to life, I wonder?" mused the old woman. "How did they know she was Dorothy? Why, of course *you* brought her back!" She pointed her skinny finger at her son. "You brought her, you are the instrument of your own undoing, my boy!" she said derisively. "Oh you poor little fool—you clever fool!"

Now he had mastered himself.

"You will tell me all there is to be told, or by God, you'll be sorry you ever spoke at all," he breathed.

"You marked her. That is why she has been recognized—you marked her!"

"I marked her?"

"Don't you remember, Digby," she spoke rapidly and seemed to find a joy in the hurt she was causing, "a tiny baby and a cruel little beast of a boy who heated a sixpence and put it on the baby's wrist?"

It came back to him instantly. He could almost hear the shriek of his victim. A summer day and a big room full of old furniture. The vision of a garden through an open window and the sound of the bees . . . a small spirit lamp where he had heated the coin. . . .

"My God!" said Digby reeling back. "I remember!"

He stared at the mocking face of his mother for a second, then turned and left the room. As he did so, there came a sharp rat-tat at the door. Swiftly he turned into his own room and ran to the window.

One glance at the street told him all that he wanted to know. He saw Jim and old Salter . . . there must have been a dozen detectives with them.

The door would hold for five minutes, and there was time to carry out his last plan.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

A MINUTE later he appeared in Eunice Weldon's room.

"I want you," he said, and there was a sinister look in his eye that made the girl cower back from him in fear that she could not master. "My dear," he said with that smile of his, "you need not be afraid, your friends are breaking into the house and in half-an-hour you will be free. What I intend doing to you is to put you in such a condition that you will not be able to give information against me until I am clear of this house. No, I am not going to kill you," he almost laughed, "and if you are not sensible enough to realize why I am taking this step, then you are a fool—and you are not a fool, Eunice."

She saw something bright and glittering in his hand and terror took possession of her.

"Don't touch me," she gasped. "I swear I will not tell," but he had gripped her arm.

"If you make a sound," his face was thrust into hers, "you'll regret it to the last day of your life."

She felt a sudden pricking sensation in her arm and tried to pull it away, but her arm was held as by a vise.

"There. It wasn't very painful, was it?"

She heard him utter a curse, and when he turned his face was red with rage.

"They've smashed in the gates," he said sharply.

She was walking toward him, her hand on the little puncture the needle had made, and her face was curiously calm.

"Are you going now?" she asked simply.

"We are going in a few minutes," said Digby, emphasizing the "we."

But even this she did not resent. She had fallen into a curious, placid condition of mind which was characterized by the difficulty, amounting to an impossibility, of remembering what happened the previous minute. All she could do was to sit down on the edge of a chair, nursing her arm. She knew it hurt her, and yet she was conscious of no hurt. It was a curious, impersonal sensation she had. To her, Digby Groat had no significance. He was a somebody whom she neither liked nor disliked. It was all very strange and pleasant.

"Put your hat on," he said and she obeyed. She never dreamt of disobeying.

He led her to the basement and through a door which communicated with a garage. It was not the garage where he kept his own car—Jim had often been puzzled to explain why Digby kept his car so far from the house. The only car visible was a covered van, such as the average tradesman uses to deliver his goods.

"Get in," said Digby and Eunice obeyed with a strange smile.

She was under the influence of that admixture of morphine and hyoscin, which destroyed all memory and will.

"Sit on the floor," he ordered and laced the canvas flap at the back. He reached under the driver's seat

and pulled out a cotton coat which had once been white, but was now disfigured with paint and grease, buttoning it up to the throat. A cap he took from the same source and pulled it over his head, so that the peak well-covered his eyes.

Then he opened the gates of a garage. He was in a mews, and with the exception of a woman who was talking to a milkman, the only two persons in sight, none saw the van emerge.

There was not the slightest suspicion of hurry on his part. He descended from his seat to close the gates and lock them, lit a pipe and clambering up, set the little van going in the direction of the Bayswater Road.

He stopped only at the petrol station to take aboard a fair supply of spirit, and then he went on, still at a leisurely pace, passing through the outlying suburbs, until he came to the long road leading from Staines to Ascot. Here he stopped and got down.

Taking the little flat case from his pocket, and recharging the glass cylinder, he opened the canvas flap at the back and looked in.

Eunice was sitting with her back braced against the side of the van, her head nodding sleepily. She looked up with a puzzled expression.

"It won't hurt you," said Digby. Again the needle went into her arm, and the piston was thrust home.

She screwed up her face a little at the pain and again fondled her arm.

"That hurt," she said simply.

Just outside Ascot a touring car was held up by two policemen and Digby slowed from necessity for the car had left him no room to pass.

"We are looking for a man and a girl," said one

of the policemen to the occupants of the car. "All right, sir, go on."

Digby nodded in a friendly way to the policeman.

"Is it all right, sergeant?"

"Off you go," said the sergeant, not troubling to look inside a van on which was painted the name of a reputable firm of London furnishers.

Digby breathed quickly. He must not risk another encounter. There would be a second barrier at the cross roads, where he intended turning. He must go back to London, he thought, the police would not stop a London-bound car. He turned into a secondary road and reached the main Bath road, passing another barrier where, as he had expected, the police did not challenge him, though they were holding up a string of vehicles going in the other direction. There were half-a-dozen places to which he could take her, but the safest was a garage he had hired at the back of a block of buildings in Paddington. The garage had been useful to the Thirteen, but had not been utilized for the greater part of a year, though he had sent Jackson frequently to superintend the cleaning.

He gained the west of London as the rain began to fall. Everything was in his favor. The mews in which the garage was situated was deserted and he had opened the gates and backed in the car before the occupants of the next garage were curious enough to come out to see who it was.

Digby had one fad and it had served him well before. It was to be invaluable now. Years before, he had insisted that every house and every room, if it were only a store room, should have a lock of such a character that it should open to his master key.



He half led, half lifted the girl from the car and she sighed wearily, for she was stiff and tired.

"This way," he said and pushed her before him up the dark stairs, keeping her on the landing whilst he lit the gas.

Though it had not been dusted for the best part of a month, the room overlooking the mews was neat and comfortably furnished. He pulled down the heavy blind before he lit the gas here, felt her pulse and looked into her eyes.

"You'll do, I think," he said with a smile. "You must wait here until I come back. I am going to get some food."

"Yes," she answered.

He was gone twenty minutes, and on his return he saw that she had taken off her coat and had washed her hands and face. She was listlessly drying her hands when he came up the stairs. There was something pathetically child-like in her attitude, and a man who was less of a brute than Digby Groat would have succumbed to the appeal of her helplessness.

But there was no hint of pity in the thoughtful eyes that surveyed her. He was wondering whether it would be safe to give her another dose. In order to secure a quick effect he had administered more than was safe already. There might be a collapse, or a failure of heart, which would be as fatal to him as to her. He decided to wait until the effects had almost worn off.

"Eat," he said, and she sat at the table obediently.

He had brought in cold meat, a loaf of bread, butter and cheese. He supplemented this feast with two glasses of water which he drew in the little scullery.

Suddenly she put down her knife and fork.

"I feel very tired," she said.

So much the better, thought Digby. She would sleep now.

The back room was a bedroom. He watched her whilst she unfastened her shoes and loosened the belt of her skirt before she lay down. With a sigh, she turned over and was fast asleep before he could walk to the other side of the bed to see her face.

Digby Groat smoked for a long time over his simple meal. The girl was wholly in his power, but she could wait. A much more vital matter absorbed his attention. He himself had reached the possibility which he had long foreseen and provided against. It was not a pleasant situation, he thought, and found relief for his mind by concentrating his thoughts upon the lovely ranch in Brazil, on which with average luck, he would spend the remainder of his days.

Presently he got up, produced from a drawer a set of shaving materials wrapped in a towel, and heating some water at the little gas-stove in the kitchen, he proceeded to divest himself of his mustache.

With the master key he unlocked the cupboard that ran the height of the room and surveyed thoughtfully the stacks of dresses and costumes which filled the half-a-dozen shelves. The two top shelves were filled with boxes, and he brought out three of these and examined their contents. From one of these he took a beautiful evening gown of silver tissue, and laid it over the back of a chair. A satin wrap followed, and from another box he took white satin shoes and stockings and seemed satisfied by his choice, for he looked at them for a long time before he folded them and

put them back where he had found them. His own disguise he had decided upon.

And now, having mapped out his plan, he dressed himself in a chauffeur's uniform, and went out to the telephone.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

“DEAD! Jane Groat dead?”

To Lady Mary the news came as a shock. Jim, gaunt and hollow eyed, sitting listlessly by the window of Mr. Salter's office, nodded.

“The doctors think it was an overdose of morphia that killed her,” he said shortly.

Lady Mary was silent for a long while, then:

“I think perhaps now is a moment when I can tell you something about the Blue Hand,” she said.

“Will it assist us?” asked Jim turning quickly.

She shook her head.

“I am afraid it will not, but this I must tell you. The person against whom the Blue Hand was directed was not Digby Groat, but his mother. I have made one grave mistake recently,” she said, “and it was to believe that Digby Groat was dominated by his mother. I was amazed to discover that so far from her dominating him, she was his slave and the only explanation I can give for this extraordinary transition is Digby Groat's discovery that his mother was a drug taker. Once he was strong enough to keep the drug from her the positions were reversed. The story of the Blue Hand,” she said with sad little smile, “is neither as fantastic nor as melodramatic as you might expect.”

There was a long silence which neither of the men broke.

"I was married at a very early age, as you know," she nodded to Salter. "My father was a very poor nobleman with one daughter and no sons, and he found it not only difficult to keep up the mortgaged estates which he had inherited, but to make both ends meet even though he was living in the most modest way. Then he met Jonathan Danton's father and between the two they fixed up a marriage between myself and Jonathan. I never met him until a week before my wedding day. He was a cold, hard man, very much like his father, just to a fault, proud and stiff-necked, and to his natural hardness of demeanor was added the fretfulness due to an affected heart, which eventually killed him.

"My married life was an unhappy one. The sympathy that I sought was denied me. With all his wealth, he could have made me happy, but from the first he seemed to be suspicious of me and I have often thought that he hated me because I was a member of a class which he professed to despise. When our daughter was born I imagined that there would be a change in his attitude, but, if anything, the change was for the worse.

"I had met his sister, Jane Groat, and knew in a vague kind of way, that some scandal had attached to her name. Jonathan never discussed it, but his father, in his life-time, loathed Jane and would not allow her to put her foot inside his house. Jonathan hadn't the same prejudices. He knew nothing of her escapade with the Spaniard Estremeda, and I only learnt of the circumstances by accident.

"Jane was a peculiar mixture. Some days she would be bright and vivacious, and some days she

would be in the depths of gloom, and this used to puzzle me, until one day we were at tea together at our house in Park Lane. She had come in a state of nerves and irritability which distressed me. I thought that her little boy was giving her trouble, for I knew how difficult he was, and how his cruel ways, even at that tender age, annoyed her. I nearly said distressed her," she smiled, "but Jane was never distressed at things like that. We were having a cup of tea when she put her hand in her bag and took out a small bottle filled with brown pellets.

" 'I really can't wait any longer, Mary,' she said and swallowed one of the pills. I thought it was something for digestion, until I saw her eyes begin to brighten and her whole demeanor change, then I guessed the truth.

" 'You're not taking drugs, are you, Jane?' I asked.

" 'I'm taking a little morphine,' she replied; 'don't be shocked, Mary. If you had my troubles and a little devil of a boy to look after, as I have, you'd take drugs, too!'

"But that was not her worst weakness, from my point of view. What that was I learnt after my husband sailed to America on business.

"Dorothy was then about seven or eight months old, a bonny, healthy, beautiful child, whom my husband adored in his cold, dour fashion. One morning Jane came into my room while I was dressing, and apologizing for her early arrival, asked me if I would go shopping with her. She was so cheerful and gay that I knew she had been swallowing some of those little pellets, and as I was at a loose end that morning I agreed. We went to several stores and finished up at Clayneys,

the big emporium in Brompton Road. I noticed that Jane made very few purchases, but this didn't strike me as being peculiar, because Jane was notoriously mean and I don't think she had a great deal of money either. I did not know Clayneys. I had never been to the shop before. This explanation is necessary in view of what followed. Suddenly, when we were passing through the silk department, Jane turned to me with a startled expression and said to me under her breath, 'put this somewhere.'

"Before I could expostulate, she had thrust something into the interior of my muff. It was a cold day and I was carrying one of those big pillow muffs which were so fashionable in that year. I had hardly done so before somebody tapped me on the shoulder. I turned to see a respectable-looking man who said sharply, 'I'll trouble you to accompany me to the manager's office.'

"I was dazed and bewildered, and the only thing I recollect was Jane whispering in my ear 'Don't give your name.' She apparently was suspected as well, for we were both taken to a large office, where an elderly man interviewed us. 'What is your name?' he asked. The first name I could think of was my maid, Madge Benson. Of course, I was half mad. I should have told them that I was Lady Mary Danton and should have betrayed Jane upon the spot. My muff was searched and inside was found a large square of silk, which was the article Jane had put into it.

"The elderly man retired with his companion to a corner of the room and I turned to Jane. 'You must get me out of this, it is disgraceful of you, Jane. Whatever made you do it?'

"'For God's sake, don't say a word,' she whispered. 'Whatever happens, I will take the responsibility. The magistrate——'

"'The magistrate?' I said in horror. 'I shall not go before a magistrate?'

"'You must, you must, it would break Jonathan's heart and he would blame you if I came into court. Quick,' she lowered her voice and began speaking rapidly. 'I know the magistrate at Paddington and I will go to him and make a confession of the whole thing. When you come up to-morrow you will be discharged. Mary, you must do this for me, you must!'

"To cut a long story short, the manager came back and summoning a policeman, gave me into custody. I neither denied my crime nor in any way implicated Jane. I found afterwards that she explained to the proprietor that she was a distant relation of mine and she had met me in the shop by accident. How can I depict the horror of that night spent in a police court cell? In my folly I even thanked God that my name had not been given. The next morning I came before the magistrate, and did not doubt that Jane had kept her word. There was nobody in the court who knew me. I was brought up under the name of Madge Benson and the elderly man from Clayneys went into the witness box and made his statement. He said that his firm had been losing considerable quantities through shop-lifting, and that he had every reason to believe I was an old hand.

"Humiliating as this experience was, I did not for one moment doubt that the magistrate would find some excuse for me and discharge me. The shame of that moment as I stood there in the dock, with the curious



crowd sneering at me! I cannot even speak of it to-day without my cheeks burning. The magistrate listened in silence, and presently he looked at me over his glasses and I waited.

"'There has been too much of this sort of thing going on,' said he, 'and I am going to make an example of you. - You will go to prison with hard labor for one month.'

"The court, the magistrate, the people, everything and everybody seemed to fade out, and when I came to myself I was sitting in a cell with the gaoler's wife forcing water between my teeth. Jane had betrayed me. She had lied when she said she would go to the magistrate, but her greatest crime had yet to be committed.

"I had been a fortnight in Holloway Gaol when she came to visit me. I was not a strong woman and they put me to work with several other prisoners in a shed where the prison authorities were making experiments with dyes. You probably don't know much about prisons," she said, "but in every county gaol through England they make an attempt to keep the prisoners occupied with some one trade. In Maidstone the printing is done for all the prisons in England—I learnt a lot about things when I was inside Holloway! In Shepton Mallet the prisoners weave. In Exeter they make harness. In Manchester they weave cotton, and so on.

"The Government was thinking of making one of the prisons a dye works. When I came to the little interview room to see Jane Groat, I had forgotten the work that had stained both my hands and it was not until I saw her starting at the hands gripping the bars,

that I realized that the prison had placed upon me a mark which only time would eradicate.

"‘May, look!’ she stammered. ‘Your hands are blue!’

"‘My hands were blue,’ said Lady Mary bitterly. ‘The blue hand became the symbol of the injustice this woman had worked.’"

"I did not reproach her. I was too depressed, too broken to taunt her with her meanness and treachery. But she promised eagerly that she would tell my husband the truth, and told me that the baby was being taken care of and that she had sent it with her own maid to Margate. She would have kept the baby at her own house she said, and probably with truth, but she feared the people seeing the baby, would wonder where I was. If the baby was out of town, I too might be out of town.

"And then occurred that terrible accident that sent, as I believed, my darling baby to a horrible death. Jane Groat saw the advantage which the death gave to her. She had discovered in some underhand fashion the terms of my husband's will, terms which were unknown to me at the time. The moment Dorothy was gone she went to him with the story that I had been arrested and convicted for shop lifting, and that the baby, whom it was my business to guard, had been left to the neglectful care of a servant and was dead.

"The shock killed Jonathan. He was found dead in his study after his sister had left him. The day before I came out of prison I received a note from Jane telling me boldly what had happened. She made no attempt to break to me gently the news of my darling baby's death. The whole letter was designed to pro-

duce on me the fatal effect that her news had produced on poor Jonathan. Happily I had some money and the property in the city, which my husband in a moment of generosity, which I am sure he never ceased to regret, had given to me. At my father's suggestion I turned this into a limited liability company, the shares of which were held and are still held, by my father's lawyer.

"Soon after my release my father inherited a considerable fortune, which on his death came to me. With that money I have searched the world for news of Dorothy, news which has always evaded me. The doubt in my mind as to whether Dorothy was dead or not concentrated on my mistrust of Jane. I believed, wrongly as I discovered, that Jane knew my girlie was alive. The blue hand was designed to terrorize her into a confession. As it happened, it only terrorized the one person in the world I desired to meet, my daughter!"

Salter had listened in silence to the recital of this strange story which Lady Mary had to tell.

"That clears up the last mystery," he said.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

ELUCIE woke and opening her eyes, tried hard to remember what had happened. Her last clear recollection was of her room in Grosvenor Square. The last person, she shivered as she recalled the moment, was Digby Groat, and he was coming toward her—she sat up in bed and reeled with the pain in her head. Where was she? She looked round. The room was meanly furnished, a heavy green blind had been drawn over the small window, but there was enough light in the room to reveal the shabby wardrobe, the common iron bed on which she lay, the cheap washstand and the threadbare carpet that covered the floor.

She was fully dressed and feeling horribly grimy. She almost wished at that moment she was back in Grosvenor Square, with its luxurious bathroom and its stinging shower-baths.

But where was she? She got off the bed and staggering across the room she pulled aside the blind. She looked out upon the backs of drab buildings. She was in London, then. Only London could provide that view. She tried to open the door, it was locked—and as she turned the handle she heard footsteps outside.

"Good morning," said Digby Groat, unlocking the door.

At first she did not recognize him in his chauffeur uniform, and without his mustache.

"You?" she said in horror. "Where am I? Why have you brought me here?"

"If I told you where you were you would be no wiser," said Digby coolly. "And the reason you are with me must be fairly obvious. Be sensible and have some breakfast."

He was looking at her with a keen professional eye. The effect of the drug had not worn off, he noticed, and she was not likely to give him a great deal of trouble.

Her throat was parched and she was ravenously hungry. She sipped at the coffee he had made, and all the time her eyes did not leave his.

"I'll make a clean breast of it," he said suddenly. "The fact is, I have got into very serious trouble and it is necessary that I should get away."

"From Grosvenor Square?" she opened her eyes wide in astonishment. "Aren't you going back to Grosvenor Square?"

He smiled.

"It is hardly likely," he said sarcastically, "your friend Steele——"

"Is he there?" she cried eagerly, clasping her hands. "Oh tell me, please."

"If you expect me to sing your lover's praises, you're going to get a jar!" said Digby without heat. "Now eat some food and shut up." His tone was quiet but menacing and she thought it best not to irritate him.

She was only beginning to understand her own position. Digby had run away and taken her with him. Why did she go, she wondered? He must have drugged her! And yet—she remembered the hypodermic syringe and instinctively rubbed her arm.

Digby saw the gesture and could almost read her thoughts. How lovely she was, he mused. No other

woman in the world, after her experience of yesterday, could face the cold morning clear-eyed and flawless as she did. The early light was always kind to her, he remembered. The brightness of her soft eyes was undiminished, untarnished was the clarity of her complexion. She was a thing of delight, a joy to the eye, even of this connoisseur of beauty, who was not easily moved by mere loveliness.

"Eunice," he said, "I am going to marry you."

"Marry me," she said startled. "Of course you will do nothing of the kind, Mr. Groat. I don't want to marry you."

"That is quite unimportant," said Digby and leaning forward over the table, he lowered his voice. "Eunice, do you realize what I am offering you and the alternative?"

"I will not marry you," she answered steadily, "and no threat you make will change my mind."

His eyes did not leave hers.

"Do you realize that I can make you glad to marry me," he said choosing his words deliberately, "and that I will stop at nothing—nothing?"

She made no reply, but he saw her color change.

"Now understand me, my dear, once and for all. It is absolutely necessary that I should marry you and you can either agree to a ceremony or you can take the consequence, and you know what that consequence will be."

She had risen to her feet and was looking down at him, and in her eyes was a contempt which would have wilted any other man than he.

"I am in your power," she said quietly, "and you must do what you will, but consciously I will never marry you. You were able to drug me yesterday, so

that I cannot remember what happened between my leaving your house and my arrival in this wretched place, and possibly you can produce a similar condition, but sooner or later, Digby Groat, you will pay for all the wrong that you have done to the world. If I am amongst the injured people who will be avenged, that is God's will."

She turned to leave the room, but he was at the door before her and pulled her arm violently towards him.

"If you scream," he said, "I will choke the life out of you."

She looked at him with contempt.

"I shall not scream."

Nor did she even wince when the bright needle passed under the skin of her forearm.

"If anything happens to me," she said in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "I will kill myself in your presence, and with some weapon of yours." Her voice faded away and he watched her.

For the first time, he was afraid. She had touched him on a sensitive point, his own personal safety. She knew. What had put that idea into her head, he wondered, as he watched the color come and go under the influence of the drug? And she would do it! He sweated at the thought. She might have done it here, and he could never have explained his innocence of her murder.

"Phew!" said Digby Groat, and wiped his forehead.

Presently he let her hand drop and guided her to a chair.

Again her hand touched her arm tenderly and then:

"Get up," said Digby and she obeyed. "Now go to your room and stay there until I tell you I want you."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

**T**HAT afternoon he had a visitor. He was, apparently, a gentleman who was anxious to rent a garage and he made one or two enquiries in the mews before he called at Digby Groat's temporary home. Those people who troubled to observe him, noticed that he stayed a considerable time within this garage, and when he came out, he seemed satisfied with his negotiations. He was in truth Villa, who had come in answer to an urgent wire.

"Well," said Digby, "is everything ready?"

"Everything is ready, dear friend," said Villa amiably. "I have the three men you want. Bronson is one, Fuentes and Silva are the others; they are known to you?"

Digby nodded. Bronson was an army aviator who had left the service under a cloud. Digby had employed him once before, to carry him to Paris—Bronson ran a passenger carrying service which Digby had financed. The other two he knew as associates of Villa—Villa had queer friends.

"Bronson will be in a field just outside Rugby. I told him to pretend he had made a false landing."

"Good," said Digby. "Now you understand that I shall be traveling north in the disguise of an old woman. A car must be waiting a mile short of the station and Fuentes must reach the line with a red hand lamp and signal the train to stop. When it stops he can clear and by that time I shall be well away. I



know Rugby well and this sketch map will tell you everything," he handed a sheet of paper to Villa. "The car must be waiting at the end of the lane marked B. on the plan—the house—is it in good condition?"

"There's a house on the property," said Villa, "but it is rather a tumbledown affair."

"It can't be worse than Kennett Hall," said Digby. "That will do splendidly. You can keep the girl there all night and bring her to Kennett Hall in the morning. I will be there to receive you. To-morrow afternoon, just before sundown, we will take our final flight to the sea."

"What about Bronson?"

"Bronson will have to be settled with," said Digby, "but you can leave that to me."

He had his own views about Bronson which it was not expedient at the moment to discuss.

"How are you going to get to the Hall?" asked the interested Villa.

"You can leave that to me also," said Digby with a frown. "Why are you so curious? I will tell you this much, that I intend taking on the car and traveling through the night."

"Why not take the girl by the car?" demanded the persistent Villa.

"Because I want her to arrive at Kennett Hall by the only way that is safe. If the Hall is being watched there is a chance of getting away again before they close in on us. No, I will be there before daybreak and make a reconnaissance. In a case like this I can trust nobody but myself, and what is more, Villa, I know the people who are watching me. Now, do you understand?"

"Perfectly, my friend," said Villa jovially, "as to that little matter of sharing out——"

"The money is here," said Digby tapping his waist, "and you will have no cause to complain. There is much to be done yet—we have not seen the worst of our adventures."

\* \* \* \* \*

For Eunice Weldon the worst was, for the moment, a splitting headache which made it an agony to lift her head from the pillow. She seemed to have passed through the day in a condition which was neither wakefulness nor sleep. She tried to remember what had happened and where she was, but the effort was so painful that she was content to lie with her throbbing head, glad that she was left alone. Several times the thought of Digby Groat came through her mind, but she was so inexplicably confused with Jim Steele that she could not separate the two personalities.

Where she was she neither knew nor cared. She was lying down and she was quiet—that satisfied her. Once she was conscious of a sharp stinging sensation in her right arm, and soon after she must have gone to sleep again, only to wake with her head racked with shooting pains as though somebody was driving red-hot nails into her brain.

At last it became so unendurable that she groaned, and a voice near her—an anxious voice, she thought—said:

"Have you any pain?"

"My head," she murmured. "It is dreadful!"

She was conscious of a "tut" of impatience, and a

most immediately afterwards somebody's arm was round her neck and a glass was held to her lips.

"Drink this," said the voice.

She swallowed a bitter draught and made a grimace of distaste.

"That was nasty," she said.

"Don't talk," said the voice. Digby was seriously alarmed at the condition in which he found her when he had returned from a visit of reconnaissance. Her color was bad, her breathing difficult and her pulse almost imperceptible. He had feared this, and yet he must continue his "treatment."

He looked down at her frowningly and felt some satisfaction when he saw the color creep back to the wax-like face, and felt the throb of the pulse under his fingers.

As to Eunice, the sudden release from pain which came almost immediately after she had taken the draught, was so heavenly that she would have been on her knees in gratitude to the man who had accomplished the miracle, and with relief from pain came sleep.

Digby heaved a sigh of relief and went back to his work. It was very pleasant work for him, for the table was covered with little packages of five thousand dollar gold bills, for he had been successful in drawing the funds of the Thirteen and exchanging them for American money. He did not want to find himself in Brazil with a wad of English notes which he could not change because the numbers had been notified.

His work finished, he strapped the belt about his waist and proceeded leisurely to prepare for the journey. A gray wig changed the appearance of his face

but he was not relying upon that disguise. Locking the door he stripped himself of his clothes and began to dress deliberately and carefully.

It was nearly eight o'clock that night when Eunice returned to consciousness. Beyond an unquenchable thirst, she felt no distress. The room was dimly illuminated by a small oil lamp that stood on the washstand, and the first thing that attracted her eye, after she had drunk long and eagerly from the glass of water that stood on the table by the side of the bed, was a beautiful evening dress of silver tissue which hung over the back of the chair. Then she saw pinned to the side of the pillow a card. It was not exactly the same shade of gray that Digby and she had received in the early stages of their acquaintance. Digby had failed to find the right color in his search at the local stationers, but he had very carefully imitated the pen-print with which the mysterious woman in black had communicated her warnings, and the girl reading at first without understanding and then with a wildly beating heart, the message of the card saw her safety assured.

"Dress in the clothes you will find here, and if you obey me without question I will save you from an ignominious fate. I will call for you but you must not speak to me. We are going to the north in order to escape Digby Groat."

The message was signed with a rough drawing of the Blue Hand.

She was trembling in every limb, for now the events of the past few days were slowly looming through the fog with which the drugs had clouded her brain. She was in the power of Digby Groat, and the mysterious

woman in black was coming to her rescue. It did not seem possible. She stood up and almost collapsed, for her head was humming and her knees seemed incapable of sustaining her weight. She held on to the head of the bedstead for several minutes before she dared begin to dress.

She forgot her raging thirst, almost forgot her weakness, as with trembling hands she fastened the beautiful dress about her and slipped on the silk stockings and satin shoes. Why did the mysterious woman in black choose this conspicuous dress, she wondered, if she feared that Digby Groat would be watching for her. She could not think consecutively. She must trust her rescuer blindly, she thought. She did her hair before the tiny mirror and was shocked to see her face. About her eyes were great dark circles; she had the appearance of one who was in a wasting sickness.

"I'm glad Jim can't see you, Eunice Weldon," she said, and the thought of Jim acted as a tonic and a spur.

Her man! How she had hurt him. She stopped suddenly in the act of brushing her hair. She remembered their last interview. Jim said she was the daughter of Lady Mary Danton! It couldn't be true, and yet Jim had said it, and that gave it authority beyond question. She stared at her reflection and then the effort of thought made her head whirl again and she sat down.

"I mustn't think, I mustn't think," she muttered, and yet thoughts and doubts, questions and speculations, crowded in upon her. Lady Mary Danton was her mother! She was the woman who had come into Jim's flat. There was a tap at the door and she started.

Was it Digby Groat? Digby who had brought her here?

"Come in," she said faintly.

The door opened but the visitor did not enter, and she saw standing on the little landing, a woman in black, heavily veiled, who beckoned to her to follow. She rose unsteadily and moved toward her.

"Where are we going?" she asked, and then, "Thank you, thank you a thousand times, for all you are doing for me!"

The woman made no reply, but walked down the stairs, and Eunice went after her.

It was a dark night; rain was falling heavily and the mews was deserted except for the taxicab which was drawn up at the door. The woman opened the door of the cab and followed Eunice into its dark interior.

"You must not ask questions," she whispered. "There is a hood to your coat. Pull it over your head."

What did it mean, Eunice wondered.

She was safe, but why were they going out of London? Perhaps Jim awaited her at the end of the journey and the danger was greater than she had imagined. Whither had Digby Groat gone, and how had this mysterious woman in black got him out of the way? She put her hand to her head. She must wait. She must have patience. All would be revealed to her in good time—and she would see Jim!

The two people who were interested in the departure of the eleven forty-five train for the north, did not think it was unusual to see a girl in evening dress, accompanied by a woman in mourning, take their

places in a reserved compartment. It was a train very popular with those visitors to London who wanted to see a theater before they left and the detective who was watching on the departure platform, scrutinizing every man who was accompanied by a woman, gave no attention to the girl in evening dress and, as they thought, her mother. Perhaps if she had not been so attired, they might have looked more closely—Digby Groat was a great student of human nature.

Lady Mary, in her restlessness, had come to Euston to supplement the watch of the detectives, and had passed every carriage and its occupants under review just before Eunice had taken her seat.

"Sit in the corner," whispered the "woman," "and do not look at the platform. I am afraid Groat will be on the look out for me."

The girl obeyed and Lady Mary, walking back seeing the young girl in evening dress, whose face was hidden from her, never dreamt of making any closer inspection. The detective strolled along the platform with her towards the entrance.

"I am afraid there will be no more trains to-night, my lady," said the bearded officer, and she nodded. "I should think they've left by motor-car."

"Every road is watched now," said Lady Mary quietly, "and it is impossible for them to get out of London by road."

At the moment the train, with a shrill whistle, began to move slowly out of the station.

"May I look now?" said Eunice, and the "woman" in black nodded.

Eunice turned her head to the platform and then with a cry, started up.

"Why, why," she cried wildly, "there is Mrs, Fane—Lady Mary, my mother!"

Another instant, and she was dragged back to her seat and a hateful voice hissed in her ear:

"Sit down!"

The "woman" in black snapped down the blind and raised "her" veil.

But Eunice knew that it was Digby Groat before she saw the yellow face of the man.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

**T**HE recognition had been mutual. Lady Mary had seen that white face, those staring eyes, for a second, and then the train had rolled quickly past her, leaving her momentarily paralyzed.

"There, there!" she gasped pointing. "Stop the train!"

The detective looked round. There was no official in sight, and he tore back to the barriers, followed by Lady Mary. He could discover nobody with authority to act.

"I'll find the station master," he cried, "can you telephone anywhere?"

There was a telephone booth within a few yards and her first thought was of Jim.

Jim was sitting in his room, his head in his hands, when the telephone bell rang, and he went listlessly to answer the call. It was Lady Mary speaking.

"Eunice is on the northern train that has just left the station," she said speaking rapidly. "We are trying to stop it at Willesden, but I am afraid it will be impossible. Oh, for God's sake do something, Jim!"

"On the northern train?" he gasped. "How long has it left?"

"A few seconds ago. . . ."

He dropped the receiver, threw open the door and ran downstairs. In that moment his decision had been taken. Like a flash there had come back to his mind

a sunny afternoon when, with Eunice at his side, he had watched a daring little boy pulling himself across the lines by the telegraph wire which crossed the railway from one side to the other. He darted into the courtyard and as he mounted the wall he heard the rumble and roar of the train in the tunnel.

It would be moving slowly because the gradient was a stiff one. From which tunnel would it emerge? There were two black openings and it might be from either. He must risk that, he thought, and reaching up for a telegraph wire, swung himself over the coping. The wires would be strong enough to hold a boy. Would they support him? He felt them sagging and heard an ominous creak from the post which was in the courtyard, but he must risk that too. Hand over hand he went, and presently he saw with consternation the gleam of a light from the further tunnel. In frantic haste he pulled himself across. There was no time for caution. The engine, laboring heavily, had passed before he came above the line. Now he was over the white-topped carriages, and his legs were curled up to avoid contact with them. He let go and dropped on his foot. The movement of the carriage threw him down and he all but fell over the side, but gripping to a ventilator, he managed to scramble to his knees.

As he did so he saw the danger ahead. The train was running into a second tunnel. He had only time to throw himself flat on the carriage, before he was all but suffocated by the sulphur fumes which filled the tunnel. He was on the right train, he was certain of that, as he lay gasping and coughing, but it would need

all his strength to hold himself in position when the driver began to work up speed.

He realized, when they came out again into the open, that it was raining and raining heavily. In a few minutes he was wet through, but he clung grimly to his perilous hold. Would Lady Mary succeed in stopping the train at Willesden? The answer came when they flashed through that junction, gathering speed at every minute.

The carriages rocked left and right and the rain-splashed roofs were as smooth as glass. It was only by twining his legs about one ventilator and holding on to the other, that he succeeded in retaining his hold at all. But it was for her sake. For the sake of the woman he loved, he told himself, when utter weariness almost forced him to release his grip. Faster and faster grew the speed of the train and now in addition to the misery the stinging rain caused him, he was bombarded by flying cinders and sparks from the engine.

His coat was smoldering in a dozen places, in spite of its sodden condition, his eyes were grimed and smarting with the dust which the rain washed into them and the agony of the attacks of cramp which were becoming more and more frequent, was almost unendurable. But he held on as the train roared through the night, dashing through little wayside stations, diving into smoky tunnels, and all the time rocking left and right, so that it seemed miraculous that it was able to keep the rails.

It seemed a century before there came from the darkness ahead a bewildering tangle of red and green lights.

They were reaching Rugby and the train was already slowing. Suddenly it stopped with unusual suddenness and Jim was jerked from his hold. He made a wild claw at the nearest ventilator, but he missed his hold and fell with a thud down a steep bank, rolling over and over . . . another second, and he fell with a splash into water.

The journey had been one of terror for Eunice Danton. She understood now the trick that had been played upon her. Digby Groat had known she would never leave willingly and had feared to use his dopest lest her appearance betrayed him. He had guessed that in his disguise of the woman in black, she would obey him instantly and now she began to understand why he had chosen evening dress for her.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

He had drawn the blinds of the carriage and was smoking a cigarette.

"If I had known you would ask that question," he said sarcastically, "I would have had a guide book prepared. As it is, you must possess your soul in patience, and wait until you discover your destination."

There was only one carriage on the train which was not a corridor car, and Digby had carefully chosen that for his reservation. It was a local car that would be detached at Rugby, as he knew, and the possibility of an interruption was remote. Once or twice he had looked up to the ceiling and frowned. The girl, who had caught a scratching sound as though somebody was crawling along the roof of the carriage, watched him as he pulled down the window and thrust out head and shoulders. He drew in immediately, his face wet with rain.

"It is a filthy night," he said as he pulled down the blinds again. "Now, Eunice, be a sensible girl. There are worse things that could happen to you than to marry me."

"I should like to know what they are," said Eunice calmly. The effect of the drug had almost worn off and she was near to her normal self.

"I have told you before," said Digby, puffing a ring of smoke to the ceiling, "that if your imagination will not supply you with a worse alternative, you are a singularly stupid young person, and you are not stupid," he stopped. Suddenly he changed his tone and throwing the cigarette on to the ground, he came over to her and sat by her side. "I want you, Eunice," he said, his voice trembling and his eyes like fiery stars. "Don't you understand I want you? That you are necessary to me. I couldn't live without you now. I would sooner see you dead and myself dead, too, than hand you to Jim Steele, or any other man." His arm was about her, his face so close to hers that she could feel his quick breath upon her cheek. "You understand?" he said in a low voice. "I would sooner see you dead. That is an alternative for you to ponder on."

"There are worse things than death."

"I'm glad you recognize that," said Digby, recovering his self-possession with a laugh. He must not frighten her at this stage of the flight. The real difficulties of the journey were not yet passed.

As to Eunice, she was thinking quickly. The train must stop soon, she thought, and though he kill her, she would appeal for help. She hated him now, with a loathing beyond description; seeing in him the ugly

reality, her soul shrank in horror from the prospect he had opened up to her. His real alternative she knew and understood only too well. It was not death—that would be merciful and final. His plan was to degrade her so that she would never again hold up her head, nor meet Jim's tender eyes. So that she would, in desperation, agree to marriage to save her name from disgrace, and her children from shame.

She feared him more now in his grotesque woman garb, with that smile of his playing upon his thin lips, than when he had held her in his arms, and his hot kisses rained on her face. It was the brain behind those dark eyes, the cool, calculating brain that had planned her abduction with such minute care, that she had never dreamt she was being duped—this was what terrified her. What scheme had he evolved to escape from Rugby, where he must know the station officials would be looking for him?

Lady Mary had seen her and recognized her and would have telegraphed to the officials to search the train. The thought of Lady Mary started a new line of speculation. Her mother! That beautiful woman of whom she had been jealous. A smile dawned on her face, a smile of sheer joy and happiness, and Digby Groat, watching her, wondered what was the cause.

She puzzled him more than he puzzled her.

"What are you smiling at?" he asked curiously, and as she looked at him the smile faded from her face. "You are thinking that you will be rescued at Rugby," he bantered.

"Rugby," she said quickly. "Is that where the train stops?" and he grinned.

"You're the most surprising person. You are con-

stantly trapping me into giving you information," he mocked her. "Yes, the train will stop at Rugby." He looked at his watch and she heard him utter an exclamation. "We are nearly there," he said, and then he took from the little silk bag he carried in his rôle of an elderly woman, a small black case, and at the sight of it Eunice shrank back.

"Not that, not that," she begged. "Please don't do that."

He looked at her.

"Will you swear that you will not make any attempt to scream or cry out so that you will attract attention?"

"Yes, yes," she said eagerly. "I will promise you."

She could promise that with safety, for if the people on the platform did not recognize her, her case was hopeless.

"I will take the risk," he said. "I am probably a fool, but I trust you. If you betray me, you will not live to witness the success of your plans, my friend."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SHE breathed more freely when she saw the little black case dropped into the bag, and then the speed of the train suddenly slackened and stopped with such a violent jerk that she was almost thrown from the seat.

"Is there an accident?"

"I don't think so," said Digby showing his teeth mirthlessly. He had adjusted his wig and his bonnet and now he was letting down the window and looking out into the night. There came to his ears a sound of voices up the line and a vista of signal lamps. He turned to the girl as he opened the door.

"Come along," he commanded sharply and she stood aghast.

"We are not in the platform."

"Come out quickly," he snarled. "Remember you promised."

With difficulty she lowered herself in the darkness and his arm supported her as she dropped to the permanent way. Still clutching her arm they stumbled and slid down the steep embankment and came presently to a field of high grass. Her shoes and stockings were sodden by the rain which was falling more heavily than ever, and she could scarcely keep her feet, but the hand that gripped her arm did not relax, nor did its owner hesitate. He seemed to know the way they were going, though to the girl it was impossible to see a yard before her.



The pitiless rain soaked her through and through before she had half crossed the field. She heard Digby curse as he caught his foot in his skirt, and at any other time she might have laughed, at the picture she conjured up of this debonair man, in his woman's dress. But now she was too terrified to be even amused.

But she had that courage which goes with great fear: the soul courage which rises superior to the weakness of the flesh.

Once Digby stopped and listened. He heard nothing but the patter of the rain and the silvery splash of the water as it ran from the bushes. He sank on his knees and looked along the ground, striving to get a skyline, but the railway embankment made it impossible. The train was moving on when the girl looked back, and she wondered why it had stopped so providentially at that spot.

"I could have sworn I heard somebody squelching through the mud," said Digby. "Come along, there is the car."

She caught the faint glimmer of a light and immediately afterwards they left the rough and soggy fields, and reached the hard road, where walking was something more of a pleasure.

The girl had lost one shoe in her progress and now she kicked off the other. It was no protection from the rain for the thin sole was soaked through, so that it was more comfortable walking in her stockinged feet.

The distance they had traversed was not far. They came from the side lane on to the main road, where a closed car was standing, and Digby hustled her in, saying a few low words to the driver, and followed her.

"Phew, this cursed rain," he said, and added with a laugh, "I ought not to complain. It has been a very good friend to me."

Suddenly there was a gleam of light in the car. He had switched on a small electric lamp.

"Where are your shoes?" he demanded.

"I left them in the field," she said.

"Damn you, why did you do that?" he demanded angrily. "You think you were leaving a clue for your lover, I suppose?"

"Don't be unreasonable, Mr. Groat. They weren't my shoes, so they couldn't be very much of a clue for him. They were wet through and as I had lost one, I kicked off the other."

He did not reply to this, but sat huddled in a corner of the car, as it ran along the dark country road.

They must have been traveling for a quarter of an hour, when the car stopped before a small house and Digby jumped out. She would have followed him, but he stopped her.

"I will carry you," he said.

"It is not necessary," Eunice replied coldly.

"It is very necessary to me," he interrupted her. "I don't want the marks of your stockinged feet showing on the roadside."

He lifted her in his arms; it would have been foolish of her to have made resistance, and she suffered contact with him until he set her down in a stone passage in a house that smelt damp and musty.

"Is there a fire here?" he spoke over his shoulders to the chauffeur.

"Yes, in the back room. I thought maybe you'd want one, boss."

"Light another," said Digby. He pushed open the door and the blaze from the fire was the only light in the room.

Presently the driver brought in an oil motor-lamp. In its rays Digby was a ludicrous spectacle. His gray wig was soaked and clinging to his face; his dress was thick with mud, and his light shoes were in as deplorable a condition as the girl's had been.

She was in very little better case, but she did not trouble to think about herself and her appearance. She was cold and shivering and crept nearer to the fire, extending her chilled hands to the blaze.

Digby went out. She heard him still speaking in his low mumbling voice, but the man who replied was obviously not the chauffeur, though his voice seemed to have a faintly familiar ring. She wondered where she had heard it before, and after a while she identified its possessor. It was the voice of the man whom she and Jim had met coming down the steps of the house in Grosvenor Square.

Presently Digby came back carrying a suit case.

"It is lucky for you, my friend, that I intended you should change your clothes here," he said as he threw the case down. "You will find everything in there you require."

He pointed to a bed which was in the corner of the room.

"We have no towels, but if you care to forego your night's sleep, or sleep in blankets, you can use the sheets to dry yourself," he said.

"Your care for me is almost touching," she said scornfully and he smiled.

"I like you when you are like that," he said in

admiration. "It is the spirit in you and the devil in you that appeal to me. If you were one of those puling, whining misses, all shocks and shivers, I would have been done with you a long time ago. It is because I want to break that infernal pride of yours and because you offer me a contest that you stand apart from, and above, all other women."

She made no reply to this, and waited until he had gone out of the room before she looked for some means of securing the door. The only method apparently was to place a chair under the door-knob, and this she did, undressing quickly and utilizing the sheet as Digby had suggested.

The windows were shuttered and barred. The room itself, except for the bed and the chair, was unfurnished and dilapidated. The paper was hanging in folds from the damp walls and the under part of the grate was filled with the ashes of fires that had burnt years before and the smell of decay almost nauseated her.

Was there any chance of escape, she wondered? She tried the shuttered window, but found the bars were so thick that it was impossible to wrench them from their sockets without the aid of a hammer. She did not dream that they would leave the door unguarded, but it was worth trying, and she waited until the house seemed quiet before she made her attempt.

Stepping out into the dark passage, she almost trod on the hand of Villa, who was lying asleep in the passage. He was awake instantly.

"Do you want anything, Miss?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied, and went back to the room.

It was useless, useless, she thought bitterly, and she must wait to see what the morrow brought forth.

Her principal hope lay in her—her mother. How difficult that word was to say! How much more difficult to associate a name, the mention of which brought up the picture of the pleasant-faced woman who had been all that a mother could be to her in South Africa, with that gracious lady she had seen in Jim Steele's flat!

She lay down, not intending to sleep, but the warmth of the room and her own tiredness, made her doze. It seemed she had not slept more than a few minutes when she woke to find Villa standing by her side with a huge cup of cocoa in his hand.

"I'm sorry I can't give you tea, miss," he said.

"What time is it?" she asked in surprise.

"Five o'clock. The rain has stopped and it is a good morning for flying."

"For flying?" she repeated in amazement.

"For flying," said Villa, enjoying the sensation he had created. "You are going a little journey by aëroplane."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

**J**IM STEELE had had as narrow an escape from death as he had experienced in the whole course of his adventurous life. It was not a river into which he tumbled, but a deep pool, the bottom of which was a yard thick with viscid mud in which his feet and legs were held as by hidden hands.

Struggle as he did, he could not release their grip, and he was on the point of suffocation when his groping hands found a branch of a tree which, growing on the edge of the pond, had drooped one branch until its end was under water. With the strength of despair, he gripped, and drew himself up by sheer force of muscle. He had enough strength left to drag himself to the edge of the pond, and there he lay, oblivious to the rain, panting and fighting for his breath.

In the old days of the war, his comrades of the Scout Squadron used to tick off his lives on a special chart which was kept in the messroom. He had exhausted the nine lives with which they had credited him, when the war ended, and all further risk seemed at an end.

"There go two more!" he gasped to himself. His words must have been inspired, for as he drew himself painfully to his bruised knees, he heard a voice not a dozen yards away and thanked God again. It was Digby Groat speaking.

"Keep close to my side," said Digby.

"I will," muttered Jim and walked cautiously in the direction where he had heard the voice, but there

was nobody in sight. The train which had been stationary on the embankment above—he had forgotten the train—began to move, and in the rumble of its wheels, any sound might well be drowned.

He increased his pace, but still he did not catch sight of the two people he was tracking. Presently he heard footsteps on a roadway, but only of a man.

They had reached better going than the field, thought Jim, and moved over in the same direction. He found the lane and as he heard the footsteps receding at the far end, he ran lightly forward hoping to overtake them before they reached the car, the red rear-light of which he could see. The wheels were moving as he reached the open road and he felt for his revolver. If he could burst the rear tires he could hold them. Jim was a deadly shot. Once, twice, he pressed the trigger, but there was no more than a "click," as the hammer struck the sodden cartridge, and before he could extract the dud and replace it, the car was out of range.

He was aching in every limb. His arms and legs were cramped painfully but he was not deterred. Putting the useless pistol in his pocket, he stepped off at a jog trot, following in the wake of the car.

He was a magnificent athlete and he had, too, the intangible gift of class, that imponderable quality which distinguishes the great race horse from the merely good. It served a triple purpose, this exercise. It freed the cramped muscles, it warmed his chilled body and it cleared the mind. He had not been running for ten minutes before he had forgotten that within the space of an hour he had nearly been hurled to death from the roof of a train and had all but choked to death in the muddy depths of a pond.

On, on, without either slackening or increasing his pace, the same steady lop-logging stride that had broken the heart of the Oxford crack when he had brought victory to the light blue side at Queen's Park.

It was half-an-hour before he came in sight of the car, and he felt well rewarded, although he had scarcely glimpsed it before it had moved on again.

Why had it stopped, he wondered, checking his pace to a walk. It may have been tire trouble. On the other hand they might have stopped at a house, one of Digby Groat's numerous depots through the country.

He saw the house at last and went forward with greater caution, as he heard a man's voice asking the time.

He did not recognize either Villa nor Bronson, for though he had heard Villa speak, he had no very keen recollection of the fact. "What to do?" murmured Jim.

The house was easily approachable, but to rush in with a defective revolver, would help neither him nor the girl. If that infernal pond had not been there! He groaned in the spirit. That he was wise in his caution he was soon to discover. Suddenly a man loomed up before him and Jim stopped dead on the road. The man's back was toward him and he was smoking as he walked up and down taking his constitutional, for the rain had suddenly ceased. He passed so close as he turned back, that had he stretched out his hand toward the bushes under which Jim was crouching, he would not have failed to touch him:

In a little while a low voice called:

"Bronson!"



"Bronson!" thought Jim. "I must remember that name!"

The man turned and walked quickly back to the house, and the two talked in a tone so low that not a syllable reached Jim.

At the risk of discovery he must hear more, and crept up to the house. There was a tiny porch before the door and under this the two men were standing.

"I will sleep in the passage," said the deep-throated Villa. "You can take the other room if you like."

"Not me," said the man called Bronson. "I'd rather stand by the machine all night. I don't want to sleep anyway."

"What machine?" wondered Jim. "Was there an other motor-car here?"

"Will the boss get there to-night?" asked Villa.

"I can't tell you, Mr. Villa," replied Bronson. "He might not, of course, but if there are no obstacles, he'll be at the Hall before daybreak. It is not a very good road."

At the Hall! In a flash it dawned upon Jim. Kennett Hall! The pile of buildings which Mrs. Weatherwale had pointed out to him as the one-time ancestral home of the Dantons. What a fool he had been not to remember that place when they were discussing the possible shelters that Digby Groat might use.

Both Villa and Bronson were smoking now and the fragrance of the former man's cigar came to the envious Jim.

"She won't give any trouble, will she, Mr. Villa?" asked Bronson.

"Trouble?" Villa laughed. "Not she. She'll be

frightened to death. I don't suppose she's ever been in an aëroplane before."

So that was the machine. Jim's eyes danced. An aëroplane . . . where? He strained his eyes to beyond the house but it was too dark to distinguish anything.

"Nothing funny will happen to that machine of yours in the rain?"

"Oh no," said Bronson. "I have put the sheet over the engines. I have frequently kept her out all night."

Then you're a bad man, thought Jim, to whom an aëroplane was a living, palpitating thing. So Eunice was there and they were going to take her by aëroplane somewhere. What should he do? There was time for him to go back to Rugby and inform the police, but—

"Where is Fuentes?" asked Bronson. "Mr. G. said he would be here."

"He's along the Rugby Road," replied Villa. "I gave him a signal pistol to let us know in case they send a police car after us. If you aren't going to bed, Bronson, I will, and you can wait out here and keep your eye open for any danger."

Fuentes was in it, too, and his plan to get back to Rugby would not work. Nevertheless, the watchful Fuentes had allowed Jim to pass, though it was likely that he was nearer to Rugby than the place where he had come out on to the road. They might not get the girl away on the machine in the darkness, but who knows what orders Digby Groat had left for her disposal in case a rescue was attempted? He decided to wait near, hoping against hope that a policeman cyclist would pass.

Villa struck a match to start a new cigar and in its

light Jim had a momentary glimpse of the two men. Bronson was in regulation air-kit. A leather coat reached to his hips, his legs were encased in leather breeches and top-boots. He was about his height, Jim thought, as an idea took shape in his mind. What an end to that adventure! Jim came as near to being excited as ever he had been in his life.

Presently Villa yawned.

"I'm going to lie down in the passage, and if that dame comes out, she's going to have a shock," he said. "Good-night. Wake me at half-past four."

Bronson grunted something and continued his perambulations up and down the road. Ten minutes passed, a quarter-of-an-hour, half-an-hour, and the only sound was the dripping of the rain from the trees, and the distant clatter and rumble of the trains as they passed through Rugby.

To the north were the white lights of the railway sidings and workshops, to the west, the faint glow in the sky marked the position of a town. Jim pulled his useless pistol from his pocket and stepped on to the roadway, crouching down, so that when he did rise, he seemed to the astonished Bronson to have sprung out of the ground. Something cold and hard was pushed under the spy's nose.

"If you make a sound, you son of a thief," said Jim, "I'll blow your face off! Do you understand that?"

"Yes," muttered the man, shivering with fright.

Jim's left hand gripped his collar. The automatic pistol under his nose was all too obvious, and Felix Bronson, a fearful man for whom the air alone had no terror, was cowed and beaten.

"Where is the bus?" asked Jim in a whisper.

"In the field behind the house," the man answered in the same tone. "What are you going to do? Who are you? How did you get past——"

"Don't ask so many questions," said Jim, "lead the way—not that way," as the man turned to pass the house.

"I shall have to climb the fence if I don't go that way," said Bronson sullenly.

"Then climb it," said Jim, "it will do you good, you lazy devil!"

They walked across the field, and presently Jim saw a graceful outline against the dark sky.

"Now take off your clothes," he said peremptorily.

"What do you mean?" demanded the startled Bronson. "I can't undress here!"

"I'm sorry to shock your modesty, but that is just what you are going to do," said Jim, "and it will be easier to undress you alive than to undress you dead, as I know from my sorrowful experience in France."

Reluctantly Bronson stripped his leather coat.

"Don't drop it on the grass," said Jim, "I want something dry to wear."

In the darkness Bronson utilized an opportunity that he had already considered. His hand stole stealthily to the hip pocket of his leather breeches, but before it closed on its objective, Jim had gripped it and spun him round, for Jim possessed other qualities of the cat besides its lives.

"Let me see that lethal weapon. Good," said Jim and flung his own to the grass. "I am afraid mine is slightly damaged, but I'll swear that yours is in good trim. Now, off with those leggings and boots."

"I shall catch my death of cold," Bronson's teeth were chattering.

"In which case," said the sardonic Jim, "I shall send a wreath, but I fear you are not born to die of cold in the head, but of a short sharp jerk to your cervical vertebra."

"What is that?" asked Bronson.

"It is German for neck," said Jim, "and if you think I am going to stand here giving you lectures on anatomy whilst you deliver the goods, you have made a mistake—strip!"

## CHAPTER FORTY

**U**NDER menace of Jim Steele's pistol, Mr. Bronson stripped and shivered. The morning was raw and the clothes that Jim in his mercy handed to the man to change were not very dry. Bronson said as much, but evoked no sympathy from Jim. He stood shivering and shaking in the wet clothes, whilst his captor strapped his wrists behind.

"Just like they do when they hang you," said Jim to cheer him up. "Now, my lad, I think this handkerchief round your mouth and a nearly dry spot under a hedge is all that is required to make the end of a perfect night."

"You're damned funny," growled Bronson in a fury, "but one of these days——"

"Don't make me sing," said Jim, "or you'll be sorry."

He found him a spot under a hedge, which was fairly dry and sheltered from observation, and there he entertained his guest until the gray in the sky warned him that it was time to wake Villa.

Mr. Villa woke with a curse.

"Come in and have some cocoa."

"Bring it out here," said Jim. He heard the man fumbling with the lock of the door and raised his pistol.

Something inside Jim Steele whispered:

"Put that pistol away," and he obeyed the impulse, as with profit he had obeyed a hundred others.

Men who fight in the air and who win their battles in the great spaces of the heavens, are favored with instincts which are denied to the other mortals who walk the earth.

He had time to slip the pistol in his pocket and pull the goggles down over his eyes, before the door opened and Villa sleepily surveyed him in the half-light.

"Hullo, you're ready to fly, are you?" he said with a guffaw. "Well, I shan't keep you long."

Jim strolled away from the house, pacing the road as Bronson had done the night before.

What had made him put the pistol away, he wondered? He took it out furtively and slipped the cover. It was unloaded!

He heard the man calling.

"Put it down," he said, when he saw the cup in his hand.

He drank the cocoa at a gulp, and making his way across the field to the aeroplane, he pulled off the waterproof cover, tested the engine and pulled over the prop.

Eunice had swallowed the hot cocoa and was waiting when Villa came in. What the day would bring forth she could only guess. Evidently there was some reason why Digby Groat should not wait for her and amongst the many theories she had formed was one that he had gone on in order to lead his pursuers from her track. She felt better now than she had done since she left the house in Grosvenor Square, for the effect of the drug had completely gone, save for a tiredness which made walking a wearisome business. Her mind was clear and the demoralizing fearfulness which the presence of Digby evoked had altogether dissipated.

"Now, young miss, are you ready?" asked Villa.

He was, at any rate. He wore a heavy coat and upon his head was a skin cap. This with his hairy face and his broad stumpy figure gave him the appearance of a Russian in winter attire. Why did he wrap himself up so on a warm morning, she wondered? He carried another heavy coat in his hand and held it up for her to put on.

"Hurry up, I can't wait for you all day. Get that coat on."

She obeyed.

"I am ready," she said coldly.

"Now, my dear, step lively!"

Jim, who had taken his place in the pilot's seat heard Villa's deep voice and looking round saw the woman he loved.

She looked divinely beautiful by the side of that squat, bearded man who was holding her forearm and urging her forward.

"Now, up with you."

He pushed her roughly into one of the two seats behind the pilot, and Jim dared not trust himself to look back.

"I'll swing the prop. for you, Bronson," said Villa, making his way to the propeller, and Jim, whose face was almost covered by the huge, fur-lined goggles, nodded. The engine started with a splutter and a roar and Jim slowed it.

"Strap the lady," he shouted above the sound of the engine, and Villa nodded and climbed into the fuselage with extraordinary agility for a man of his build.

Jim waited until the broad strap was buckled about the girl's waist, and then he let out the engine to its



top speed. It was ideal ground for taking off, and the plane ran smoothly across the grass, faster and faster with every second. And then with a touch of the lever, Jim set the elevator down and the girl suddenly realized that the bumping had stopped and all conscious motion had ceased. The scout had taken the air.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eunice had never flown in an *aéroplane* before, and for a moment she forgot her perilous position in the fascination of her new and wonderful experience. The machine did not seem to leave the earth. Rather it appeared as though the earth suddenly receded from the *aéroplane* and was sinking slowly away from them. She had a wonderful feeling of exhilaration as the powerful scout shot through the air at a hundred miles an hour, rising higher and higher as it circled above the field it had left, a maneuver which set Villa wondering, for Bronson should have known the way back to Kennett Hall without bothering to find his landmark.

But Bronson so far from being at the wheel, at that moment was lying bound hands and feet beneath a bush in the field below, and had Villa looked carefully through his field glasses, he would not have failed to see the figure of the man wearing Jim's muddy clothes. Villa could not suspect that the pilot was Jim Steele, the airman whose exploits in the abstract he had admired, but whose life he would not at this moment have hesitated to take.

"It is lovely!" gasped Eunice, but her voice was drowned in the deafening thunder of the engines.

They were soaring in great circles and above were floating the scarfs of mist that trailed their raveled

edges to the sun which tinted them so that it seemed to her the sky's clear blue was laced with golden tissue. And beneath she saw a world of wonder; here was spread a marvelous mosaic, green and brown and gray, each little pattern rigidly defined by darkened lines, fence and hedge and wall. She saw the blood red roof of house and the spread of silver lakes irregular in shape, and to her eye like gouts of mercury that some enormous hand had shaken haphazard on the earth.

"Glorious!" her lips said, but the man who sat beside her had no eye for the beauty of the scene.

Communication between the pilot and his passengers was only possible through the little telephone, the receiver of which Jim had mechanically strapped to his ear, and after a while he heard Villa's voice asking:

"What are you waiting for? You know the way?"

Jim nodded.

He knew the way back to London just as soon as he saw the railway.

The girl looked down in wonder on the huge checker board intercepted by tiny white and blue ribbons.

They must be roads, and canals, she decided, and those little green and brown patches were the fields and the pastures of Warwickshire. How glorious it was on this early summer morning, to be soaring through the cloud-wisps that flecked the sky, wrack from the storm that had passed over-night. And how amazingly soothing was the loneliness of wings! She felt aloof from the world and all its meanness. Digby Groat was no more than that black speck she could see, seemingly stationary on the white tape of a road. She knew that speck was a man and he was

walking. And within that circle alone was love and hate, desire and sacrifice.

Then her attention was directed to Villa. He was red in the face and shouting something into the telephone receiver, something she could not hear, for the noise of the engines was deafening.

She saw the pilot nod and turn to the right and the movement seemed to satisfy Villa, for he sank back in his seat.

Little by little, the nose of the *aéroplane* came back to the south, and for a long time Villa did not realize the fact. It was the sight of the town which he recognized, that brought the receiver of the telephone to his lips.

"Keep to the right, damn you, Bronson. Have you lost your sense of direction?"

Jim nodded, and again the machine banked over, only to return gradually to the southerly course, but now Villa, who had detected the maneuver, was alert.

"What is wrong with you, Bronson?" and Jim heard the menace in his voice.

"Nothing, only I am avoiding a bad air current," he answered and exaggerated as the voice was by the telephone, Villa did not dream that it was anybody but Bronson who was speaking.

Jim kept a steady course westward, and all the time he was wondering where his destination was supposed to have been. He was a raving lunatic, he thought, not to have questioned Bronson before he left him, but it had never occurred to him that his ignorance on the subject would present any difficulties.

He was making for London, and to London he intended going. That had been his plan from the first,

and now, without disguise, he banked left, accelerated his engines and the scout literally leapt forward.

"Are you mad?" It was Villa's voice in his ear, and he made no reply, and then the voice sank to a hiss: "Obey my instructions or we crash together!"

The barrel of an automatic was resting on his shoulder. He looked round, and at that moment Eunice recognized him and gave a cry.

Villa shot a swift glance at her, and then leapt forward and jerked at Jim's shoulders, bringing his head round.

"Steele!" he roared and this time the pistol was under Jim's ear. "You obey my instructions, do you hear?"

Jim nodded.

"Go right, pick up Oxford and keep it to your left until I tell you to land."

There was nothing for it now but to obey. But Jim did not fear. Had the man allowed him to reach London it might have been well for all parties. As Villa was taking an aggressive line, and had apparently recognized him, there could be only one end to this adventure, pistol or no pistol. He half twisted in his narrow seat, and looked back to Eunice with an encouraging smile, and the look he saw in her eyes amply repaid him for all the discomfort he had suffered.

But it was not to look at her eyes that he had turned. His glance lingered for a while on her waist, and then on the waist of Villa, and he saw all that he wanted to know. He must wait until the man put his pistol away—at present Villa held the ugly looking automatic in his hand. They passed over Oxford, a blur of gray

and green, for a mist lay upon the city, making it difficult to pick out the buildings.

Soon Jim's attention was directed elsewhere. One of his engines had begun to miss and he suspected water was in the cylinder. Still, he might keep the machine going for a while. A direction was roared in his ear, and he bore a little more west. It seemed that the engine difficulty had been overcome, for she was running sweetly. Again he glanced back. The pistol was tucked in the breast of Villa's leather jacket, and probably would remain there till the end of the journey. To wait any longer would be madness.

Eunice watching the scene below in a whirl of wonder, suddenly felt the nose of the *aéroplane* dive down, as though it were aiming directly for earth. She experienced no sense of fear, only a startled wonder, for as suddenly the nose of the *aéroplane* came up again with a rush and the sky seemed to turn topsy-turvy. There was a tremendous strain at the leather belt about her waist, and looking "down" she found she was staring at the sky! Then she was dimly conscious of some commotion on her right and shut her eyes in instinctive apprehension. When she opened them again, Villa was gone! Jim had looped the loop, and unprepared for this form of attack, Villa, who was not secured to the machine, had lost his balance and fallen. Down, down, the tiny fly shape twirled and rolled with outstretched arms and legs, tragically comic in its grotesqueness. . . .

Jim turned his head away and this time swung completely round to the girl, and she saw his lips move and his eyes glance at the telephone which the man had left.

She picked up the mouthpiece with trembling hands. Something dreadful had happened. She dare not look down, she would have fainted if she had made the attempt.

"What has happened?" she asked in a quavering voice.

"Villa has parachuted to the ground," lied Jim soothingly. "Don't worry about him. He's not in any danger—in this world," he added under his breath.

"But, Jim, how did you come here?"

"I'll have to explain that later," he shouted back, "my engine is misbehaving."

This time the trouble was much more serious, and he knew that the journey to London he had contemplated would be too dangerous to attempt. He was not at sufficient height to command any ground he might choose, and he began to search the countryside for a likely landing. Ahead of him, fifteen miles away, was a broad expanse of green, and a pin-point flicker of white caught his eye. It must be an aërodrome, he thought, and the white was the ground signal showing the direction of the winds. He must reach that haven, though had he been alone, he would not have hesitated to land on one of the small fields beneath him.

Here the country is cut up into smaller pastures than in any other part of England, and to land on one of those fields with high hedges, stiff and stout stone walls would mean the risk of a crash, and that was a risk he did not care to take.

As he drew nearer to the green expanse, he saw that he had not been mistaken. The sheet was obviously planted for the purpose of signaling and a rough attempt had been made to form an arrow. He shut off

his engines and began to glide down and the wheels touched the earth so lightly that Eunice did not realize that the flight was ended.

"Oh it was wonderful, Jim," she cried as soon as she could make herself heard, "but what happened to that poor man? Did you——"

There was a flippant reply on Jim's lips, but when he saw the white face and the sorrowful eyes, he decided it was not a moment for flippancy. He who had seen so many better men than Villa die in the high execution of their duty, was not distressed by the passing of a blackguard who would have killed him and the girl without mercy.

He lifted Eunice and felt her shaking under the coat she wore. And so they met again in these strange circumstances, after the parting which she had thought was final. They spoke no word to one another. He did not kiss her; nor did she want that evidence of his love. His very presence, the grip of his hands, each was a dear caress which the meeting of lips could not enhance.

"There's a house here," said Jim recovering his breath. "I must take you there and then go and telegraph dear old Salter."

He put his arm about her shoulder and slowly they walked across the grasses gemmed with wild flowers. Knee-deep they paced through the wondrous meadowland, and the scent of the red earth was incense to the benediction which had fallen on them.

"This house doesn't seem to be occupied," said Jim, "and it is a big one, too."

He led the way along a broad terrace and they came to the front of the building. The door stood open and

there the invitation ended. Jim looked into a big dreary barn of a hall, uncarpeted and neglected.

"I wonder what place this is," said Jim puzzled.

He opened a door that led from the hall to the left. The room into which he walked was unfurnished and bore the same evidence of decay as the hall had shown. He crossed the floor and entered a second room, with no other result. Then he found a passage way.

"Is anybody here?" he called, and turned immediately. He thought he heard a cry from Eunice, whom he had left outside on the terrace admiring the beauty of the Somerset landscape. "Was that you, Eunice?" he shouted and his voice reverberated through the silent house.

There was no reply. He returned quickly by the way he had come, but when he reached the terrace Eunice was gone! He ran to the end, thinking she had strolled back to the machine, but there was no sign of her. He called her again, at the top of his voice, but only the echoes answered. Perhaps she had gone into the other room. He opened the front door and again stepped in.

As he did so Xavier Silva crept from the room on the left and poised his loaded cane. Jim heard the swish of the stick and half turning took the blow short on his shoulder. For a second he was staggered and then driving left and right to the face of the man he sent him spinning.

Before he could turn, the noose of a rope dropped over his head and he was jerked to the ground fighting for breath.



## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

WHILST Jim had been making his search of the deserted house, Eunice had strolled to the edge of the terrace, and leaning on the broken balustrade, was drinking in the beauty of the scene. Thin wraiths of mist still lingered in the purple shadows of the woods and lay like finest muslin in the hollows. In the still air the blue gray smoke of the cottagers' fires showed above the tree tops, and the sun had touched the surface of a stream that wound through a distant valley, so that it showed as a thread of bubbling gold amidst the verdant green.

Somebody touched her gently on the shoulder. She thought it was Jim.

"Isn't it lovely, Jim?"

"Very lovely, but not half as lovely as you, my dear."

She could have collapsed at the voice. Swinging round she came face to face with Digby Groat, and uttered a little cry.

"If you want to save Steele's life," said Digby in a low, urgent tone, "you will not cry out, you understand?"

She nodded.

He put his arm round her shoulder and she shivered, but it was no caress he offered. He was guiding her swiftly into the house. He swung open a door and pushing her through, followed.

There was a man in the room, a tall, dour man, who held a rope in his hand.

"Wait, Masters," whispered Digby. "We'll get him as he comes back." He had heard the footsteps of Jim in the hall and then suddenly there was a scuffle.

Eunice opened her lips to cry a warning, but Digby's hand covered her mouth and his face was against her ear.

"Remember what I told you," he whispered.

There was a shout outside; it was from Xavier, and Masters dashed out ahead of his employer. Jim's back was turned to the open door, and Digby signaled. Immediately the rope slipped round Jim's neck and he was pulled breathlessly to the ground, his face grew purple and his hands were tearing at the cruel noose. They might have choked him then and there, but that Eunice, who had stood for a moment paralyzed, flew out of the room, and thrusting Masters aside, knelt down and with her own trembling hands released the noose about her lover's neck.

"You beasts, you beasts!" she cried, her eyes flashing her hate.

In an instant Digby was on her and had lifted her clear.

"Rope him," he said laconically and gave his attention to the struggling girl. For now Eunice was no longer quiescent. She fought with all her might, striking at his face with her hands, striving madly to free herself of his grip.

"You little devil!" he cried breathlessly, when he had secured her wrists and had thrust her against the wall. There was an ugly red mark where her nails had caught his face, but in his eyes there was nothing but admiration.

"That is how I like you best," he breathed. "My

dear, I have never regretted my choice of you! I regret it least at this moment!"

"Release my hands!" she stormed. She was panting painfully and judging that she was incapable of further mischief, he obeyed.

"Where have you taken Jim? What have you done with him?" she asked, her wide eyes fixed on his. There was no fear in them now. He had told her that he had seen the devil in her. Now it was fully aroused.

"We have taken your young friend to a place of safety," said Digby. "What happened this morning, Eunice?"

She made no reply.

"Where is Villa?"

Still she did not answer.

"Very good," he said, "if you won't speak, I'll find a way of making your young man very valuable."

"You'd make him speak!" she said scornfully. "You don't know the man you're dealing with. I don't think you've ever met that type in the drawing-rooms you visited during the war. The real men were away in France, Digby Groat. They were running the risks you shirked, facing the dangers you feared. If you think you can make Jim Steele talk, go along and try!"

"You don't know what you're saying," he said, white to the lips, for her calculated insult had touched him on the raw. "I can make him scream for mercy."

She shook her head.

"You judge all men by yourself," she said, "and all women by the poor little shop-girls you have broken for your amusement."

"Do you know what you're saying?" he said, quiver-

ing with rage. "You seem to forget that I am——"

"I forget what you are!" she scoffed. The color had come back to her face and her eyes were bright with anger. "You're a half-breed, a man of no country and no class, and you have all the attributes of a half-breed. Digby Groat, a threatener of women and an assassin of men, a thief who employs other thieves to take the risks whilst he takes the lion's share of the loot. A quack experimenter, who knows enough of medicines to drug women and enough of surgery to torture animals—I have no doubt about *you*!"

For a long time he could not speak. She had insulted him beyond forgiveness, and with an uncanny instinct had discovered just the things to say that would hurt him most.

"Put out your hands," he almost yelled, and she obeyed, watching him contemptuously as he bound them together with the cravat which he had torn from his neck.

He took her by the shoulders, and pushing her feet from her urgently, sat her in a corner.

"I'll come back and deal with you, my lady," he growled.

Outside in the hall Masters was waiting for him and the big uncouth man was evidently troubled.

"Where have you put him?"

"In the east wing, in the old butler's rooms," he said, ill-at-ease. "Mr. Groat, isn't this a bad business?"

"What do you mean, bad business?" snarled Digby.

"I've never been mixed up in this kind of thing before," said Masters. "Isn't there a chance that they will have the law on us?"

"Don't you worry, you'll be well paid," snapped his employer, and was going away when the man detained him.

"Being well paid won't keep me out of prison, if this is a prison job," he said. "I come of respectable people, and I've never been in trouble all my life. I'm well-known in the country, and although I'm not very popular in the village, yet nobody can point to me and say that I've done a prison job."

"You're a fool," said Digby, glad to have someone to vent his rage upon. "Haven't I told you that this man has been trying to run off with my wife?"

"You didn't say anything about her being your wife," said Masters, shaking his head and looking suspiciously at the other, "and besides, she's got no wedding ring. That's the first thing I noticed. And that foreign man hadn't any right to strike with his cane—it might have killed him."

"Now look here, Masters," said Digby, controlling himself, for it was necessary that the man should be humored, "don't trouble your head about affairs that you can't understand. I tell you this man Steele is a scoundrel who has run away with my wife and has stolen a lot of money. My wife is not quite normal, and I am taking her away for a voyage . . ." he checked himself. "Anyway, Steele is a scoundrel," he said.

"Then why not hand him over to the police," said the uneasy Masters, "and bring him before the justices? That seems to me the best thing to do, Mr. Groat. You're going to get a bad name if it comes out that you treated this gentleman as roughly as you did."

"I didn't treat him roughly," said Digby coolly, "and it was you who slipped the rope round his neck."

"I tried to get it over his shoulders," explained Masters hastily, "besides, you told me to do it."

"You'd have to prove that," said Digby, knowing that he was on the right track. "Now listen to me, Masters. The only person who has committed any crime so far has been you!"

"Me?" gasped the man. "I only carried out your orders."

"You'd have to prove that before your precious justices," said Digby with a laugh and dropped his hand on the man's shoulder, a piece of familiarity which came strangely to Masters, who had never known his employer in such an amiable mood. "Go along and get some food ready for the young lady," he said, "and if there is any trouble, I'll see that you get clear of it. And here," he put his hand in his pocket and took out a wad of notes, picked two of them out and pressed them into the man's hand. "They are twenty-pound bank-notes, my boy, and don't forget it and try to change them as fivers. Now hurry along and get your wife to find some refreshment for the young lady."

"I don't know what my wife's going to say about it," grumbled the man, "when I tell her——"

"Tell her nothing," said Digby sharply. "Damn you, don't you understand plain English?"

At three o'clock that afternoon a hired car brought two passengers before the ornamental gate of Kennett Hall, and the occupants, failing to secure admission, climbed the high wall and came trudging up toward the house.

Digby saw them from a distance and went down to meet the bedraggled Bronson and the dark-skinned Spaniard who was his companion. They met at the end of the drive, and Bronson and his master, speaking together, made the same inquiry in identical terms:

"Where is Villa?"

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

THE room into which Jim was thrust differed little from those chambers he had already seen, save that it was smaller. The floor boards were broken and there were holes in the wainscot which he understood long before he heard the scamper of the rats' feet.

He was trussed like a fowl, his hands were so tightly corded together that he could not move them and his ankles roped so that it was next to impossible to lever himself to his feet.

"What a life!" said Jim philosophically, and prepared himself for a long, long wait.

He did not doubt that Digby would leave immediately, and Jim faced the prospect of being left alone in the house, to make his escape or die. He was fully determined not to die, and already his busy mind had evolved a plan which he would put into execution as soon as he knew he was not under observation.

But Digby remained in the house, as he was to learn.

An hour passed, and then the door was snapped open and Digby came in, followed by a man at the sight of whom Jim grinned. It was Bronson, looking ludicrous in Jim's clothes, which were two sizes too large for him.

"They discovered you, did they, Bronson?" he chuckled. "Well, here am I as you were, and presently somebody will discover me and then I shall be calling on you in Dartmoor some time this year, to see how you are getting along. Nice place, Dartmoor, and



the best part of the prison is Block B. Central heating, gas, hot water laid on, and every modern convenience except tennis——”

“Where is Villa?” asked Digby.

“I don’t know for a fact,” said Jim pleasantly, “but I can guess.”

“Where is he?” roared Bronson, his face purple with rage.

Jim smiled, and in another minute the man’s open hand had struck him across the face, but still Jim smiled, though there was something in his eyes that made Bronson quail.

“Now, Steele, there’s no sense in your refusing to answer,” said Digby. “We want to know what you have done with Villa? Where is he?”

“In hell,” said Jim calmly. “I’m not a whale on theology, Groat, but if men are punished according to their deserts, then undoubtedly your jovial pal is in the place where the bad men go and there is little or no flying.”

“Do you mean that he is dead?” asked Digby livid.

“I should think he is,” said Jim carefully. “We were over five thousand feet when I looped the loop from sheer happiness at finding myself once again with a joy-stick in my hand, and I don’t think your friend Villa had taken certain elementary precautions. At any rate, when I looked round, where was Villa? He was flying through the air on his own, Groat, and my experience is that when a man starts flying without his machine, the possibility of making a good landing is fairly remote.”

“You killed him,” said Bronson between his teeth, “damn you!”

"Shut up," snapped Digby. "We know what we want to know. Where did you throw him out?"

"Somewhere around," said Jim carelessly. "I chose a deserted spot. I should have hated it if he had hurt anybody when he fell."

Digby went out of the room without a word, and locked the door behind him, and did not speak until he was back in the room where he had left Villa less than a week before. He shuddered as he thought of the man's dreadful end.

The two Spaniards were there, and they had business which could not be postponed. Digby had hoped they would rely on his promise and wait until he had reached a place of safety before they insisted on a share-out, but they were not inclined to place too high a value upon their chief's word. Their share was a large one, and Digby hated the thought of paying them off, but it had to be done. He had still a considerable fortune. No share had gone to the other members of the gang.

"What are your plans?" asked Xavier Silva.

"I'm going to Canada," replied Digby. "You may watch the agony columns of the newspapers for my address."

The Spaniard grinned.

"I shall be watching for something more interesting," he said, "for my friend and I are returning to Spain. And Bronson, does he go with you?"

Digby nodded.

It was necessary, now that Villa had gone, to take the airman into his confidence. He had intended leaving his shadow in the lurch, a fact which Bronson did not suspect. He sent the two men into the grounds

to give the machine an examination, and Jim, sitting in his room, heard the noise of the engine and struggled desperately to free his hands. If he could only get up to his feet! All his efforts must be concentrated upon that attempt.

Presently the noise ceased; Xavier Silva was a clever mechanic, and he had detected that something was wrong with one of the cylinders.

"Tuning up!" murmured Jim.

So he had more time than he had hoped for.

He heard a step on the stone terrace, and through the window caught a glimpse of Bronson passing. Digby had sent the man into the village to make judicious inquiries as to Villa's fate.

Curiously enough, the three men who had watched the approaching *aéroplane* from the terrace of Kennett Hall, had been unconscious of Villa's doom, although they were witnesses of the act. They had seen the loop in the sky and Digby had thought no more than that Bronson was showing off to the girl, and had cursed him roundly for his folly. Villa's body must be near at hand. How near, Bronson was to discover at the village inn.

After the man had left, Digby went to look at his second prisoner, and found her walking up and down the room into which she had been put for safety.

"Did you like your *aéroplane* journey, Eunice?" he asked blandly.

She did not reply.

"Rather thrilling and exciting, wasn't it? And were you a witness to the murder of my friend Villa?"

She looked up at him.

"I don't remember that your friend Villa was mur-

dered," she said, ready to defend Jim of any charge that this man might trump up against him.

He read her thoughts.

"Don't worry about Mr. Steele," he said drily. "I am not charging him with murder. In fact, I have no time. I am leaving to-morrow night as soon as it is dark, and you are coming with me by aeroplane."

She did not answer this.

"I am hoping that you won't mind a brief emersion in the sea," he said. "I cannot guarantee that we can land on my yacht."

She turned round. On his yacht! That, then was the plan. She was to be carried off to a yacht, and the yacht was to take her—where?

There was a clatter of feet in the outer room and he opened the door. One glance at Bronson's face told him that he had important news.

"Well?" he asked sharply.

"They've found Villa's body. I saw a reporter at the inn," said the man breathlessly.

"Do they know who it is?" asked Digby, and Bronson nodded.

"What?" asked Digby startled. "They know his name is Villa?"

Again the man nodded.

"They found a paper in his pocket, a receipt for the sale of a yacht," he said, and through the open doorway, Eunice saw the man shrink back.

"Then they know about the yacht!"

The news confounded him and shook him from his calm. If the police knew about the yacht his difficulties became all but insuperable, and the danger

which threatened him loomed up like a monstrous, overwhelming shape. Digby Groat was not built to meet such stunning emergencies and he went all to pieces under the shock.

Eunice watching him through the open door saw his pitiable collapse. In a second he had changed from the cool, self-possessed man who had sneered at danger into a babbling, fretful child who cursed and wrung his hands, issuing incoherent orders only to countermand them before his messenger had left the room.

"Kill Steele!" he screamed. "Kill him, Bronson. Damn him—no, no, stay! Get the machine ready . . . we leave to-night."

He turned to the girl, glaring at her.

"We leave to-night, Eunice! To-night you and I will settle accounts!"

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

HER heart sank and it came to her, with terrifying force, that her great trial was near at hand. She had taunted Digby with his cowardice, but she knew that he would show no mercy to her, and unwillingly she had played into his hands by admitting that she knew she was the heiress to the Danton fortune and that she had known his character, and yet had elected to stay in his house.

The door was slammed and locked, and she was left alone. Later she heard for the second time the splutter and crash of the aeroplane's engines as the Spaniard tuned them up.

She must get away—she must, she must! She looked round wildly for some means of escape. The windows were fastened. There was no other door from the room. Her only hope was Jim, and Jim, she guessed, was a close prisoner.

Digby lost no time. He dispatched Silva in the car, telling him to make the coast as quickly as possible, and to warn the captain of the *Pealigo* to be ready to receive him that night. He wrote rapidly a code of signals. When in sight of the sea Bronson was to fire a green signal light, to which the yacht must respond. A boat must be lowered on the shoreward side of the yacht ready to pick them up. After the messenger had left he remembered that he had already given the same orders to the captain, and that it was humanly impossible for the Spaniard to reach the yacht that night.

Digby had in his calmer moments made other preparations. Two inflated life-belts were taken to the *aéroplane* and tested, signal pistols, landing lights, and other paraphernalia connected with night flying were stowed in the fuselage. Bronson was now fully occupied with the motor of the *aéroplane*, for the trouble had not been wholly eradicated, and Digby Groat paced up and down the terrace of the house, fuming with impatience and sick with fear.

He had not told the girl to prepare, that must be left to the very last. He did not want another scene. For the last time he would use his little hypodermic syringe and the rest would be easy.

Fuentes joined him on the terrace, for Fuentes was curious for information.

"Do you think that the finding of Villa's body will bring them after us here?"

"How do I know?" snapped Digby, "and what does it matter anyway? We shall be gone in an hour."

"You will," said the Spaniard pointedly, "but I shan't. I have no machine to carry me out of the country and neither has Xavier, though he is better off than I am—he has the car. Couldn't you take me?"

"It is utterly impossible," said Digby irritably. "They won't be here to-night and you needn't worry yourself. Before the morning you will have put a long way between you and Kennett Hall."

He spoke in Spanish, the language which the man was employing, but Fuentes was not impressed.

"What about the man?" He jerked his thumb to the west wing, and a thought occurred to Digby.

Could he persuade his hitherto willing slave to carry out a final instruction?

"He is your danger," he said. "Do you realize, my dear Fuentes, that this man can bring us all to destruction? And nobody knows he is here, except you and me."

"And that ugly Englishman," corrected Fuentes.

"Masters doesn't know what has happened to him. We could tell him that he went with us!"

He looked at the other keenly, but Fuentes was purposely stupid.

"Now what do you say, my dear Fuentes," said Digby, "shall we allow this man to live and give evidence against us, when a little knock on the head would remove him forever?"

Fuentes turned his dark eyes to Digby's, and he winked.

"Well, kill him, my dear Groat," he mocked. "Do not ask me to stay behind and be found with the body, for I have a wholesome horror of English gaols, and an unspeakable fear of death."

"Are you afraid?" asked Digby.

"As afraid as you," said the Spaniard. "If you wish to kill him, by all means do so. And yet, I do not know that I would allow you to do that," he mused, "for you would be gone and I should be left. No, no, we will not interfere with our courageous Englishman. He is rather a fine fellow."

Digby turned away in disgust.

The "fine fellow" at that moment had, by almost superhuman effort, raised himself to his feet. It had required something of the skill of an acrobat and the suppleness and ingenuity of a contortionist, and it involved supporting himself with his head against the



wall for a quarter of an hour whilst he brought his feet to the floor, but he had succeeded.

The day was wearing through and the afternoon was nearly gone before he had accomplished this result. His trained ear told him that the aëroplane was now nearly ready for departure, and once he had caught a glimpse of Digby wearing a lined leather jacket. But there was no sign of the girl. As to Eunice, he steadfastly kept her out of his thoughts. He needed all his courage and coolness, and even the thought of her, which, in spite of his resolution flashed across his mind, brought him agonizing distress.

He hopped cautiously to the window and listened. There was no sound and he waited until Bronson—he guessed it was Bronson—started the engines again. Then with his elbow he smashed out a pane of glass, leaving a jagged triangular piece firmly fixed in the ancient putty. Carefully he lifted up his bound hands, straining at the rope which connected them with the bonds about his feet, and which was intended to prevent his raising his hands higher than the level of his waist.

By straining at the rope and standing on tiptoe, he brought the end of the connecting link across the sharp jagged edge of the glass. Two strokes, and the rope was severed. His hands were still bound and to cut through them without injury to himself was a delicate operation. Carefully he sawed away and first one and then the other cord was cut through. His hands were red and swollen, his wrists had no power until he had massaged them.

He snapped off the triangular piece of glass and applied it to the cords about his feet and in a minute he

was free. Free, but in a locked room. Stili, the window sash should not prove an insuperable obstacle. There was nothing which he could use as a weapon, but his handy feet smashed at the frame, only to discover that they were of iron. Jonathan Danton's father had had a horror of burglars and all the window frames on the lower floor had been made in a foundry. The door was the only egress left and it was too stout to smash.

He listened at the key-hole. There was no sound. The light was passing from the sky and night was coming on. They would be leaving soon, he guessed, and grew frantic. Discarding all caution, he kicked at the panels, but they resisted his heavy boots and then he heard a sound that almost stopped his heart beating.

A shrill scream from Eunice. Again and again he flung his weight at the door, but it remained immovable, and then came a shout from the ground outside. He ran to the window and listened.

"They are coming, the police!"

It was the Spaniard's throbbing voice. He had run until he was exhausted. Jim saw him stagger past the window and heard Digby say something to him sharply. There was a patter of feet and silence.

Jim wiped the sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his coat and looked round desperately for some means of getting out of the room. The fireplace! It was a big, old-fashioned fire-basket, that stood on four legs in a yawning gap of chimney. He looked at it; it was red with rust and it had the appearance of being fixed, but he lifted it readily. Twice he smashed at the door and the second time it gave way, and dropping the grate with a crash he flew down the passage out of the house.

As he turned the corner he heard the roar of the aëroplane and above its drone the sound of a shot. He leapt the balustrade, sped through the garden and came in sight of the aëroplane as it was speeding from him.

"My God!" said Jim with a groan, for the machine had left the ground and was zooming steeply up into the darkening sky.

And then he saw something. From the long grass near where the machine had been a hand rose feebly and fell again. He ran across to where he had seen this strange sight. In a few minutes he was kneeling by the side of Fuentes. The man was dying. He knew that long before he had seen the wound in his breast.

"He shot me, señor," gasped Fuentes, "and I was his friend. . . . I asked him to take me to safety . . . and he shot me!"

The man was still alive when the police came on the spot; still alive when Septimus Salter, in his capacity of Justice of the Peace, took down his dying statement.

"Digby Groat shall hang for this, Steele," said the lawyer, but Jim made no reply. He had his own idea as to how Digby Groat would die.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE lawyer explained his presence without preliminary and Jim listened moodily.

"I came with them myself because I know the place," said Mr. Salter, looking at Jim anxiously. "You look ghastly, Steele. Can't you lie down and get some sleep?"

"I feel that I shall never sleep until I have got my hand on Digby Groat. What was it you saw in the paper, tell me again? How did they know it was Villa?"

"By a receipt in his pocket," replied Salter. "It appears that Villa, probably acting on behalf of Digby Groat, had purchased from Maxilla the Brazilian gambler, his yacht, the *Pealigo*——"

Jim uttered a cry.

"That is where he has gone," he said. "Where is the *Pealigo*?"

"That I have been trying to find out," replied the lawyer shaking his head, "but nobody seems to know. She left Havre a few days ago, but what her destination was, nobody knows. She has certainly not put in to any British port so far as we can ascertain. Lloyds were certain of this, and every ship, whether it is a yacht, a liner, or a cargo tramp, is reported to Lloyds."

"That is where he has gone," said Jim.

"Then she must be in port," said old Salter eagerly. "We can telegraph to every likely place——"

Jim interrupted him with a shake of his head.

"Bronson would land on the water and sink the machine. It is a very simple matter," he said. "I have been in the sea many times and there is really no danger, if you are provided with life-belts, and are not strapped to the seat. It is foul luck your not coming before."

He walked wearily from the comfortable parlor of the inn where the conversation had taken place.

"Do you mind if I am alone for a little while—I want to think?" he said.

He turned as he was leaving the room.

"In order not to waste time, Mr. Salter," he said quietly, "have you any influence with the Admiralty? I want the loan of a seaplane."

Mr. Salter looked thoughtful.

"That can be fixed," he said, "I will get on to the 'phone straight away to the Admiralty and try to get the First Sea Lord. He will do all that he can to help us."

Whilst the lawyer telephoned, Jim made a hasty meal. The pace had told on him and despair was in his heart.

The knowledge that Digby Groat would eventually be brought to justice did not comfort him. If Eunice had only been spared he would have been content to see Digby make his escape and would not have raised his hand to stop him going. He would have been happy even if in getting away the man had been successful in carrying off the girl's fortune. But Eunice was in his wicked hands and the thought of it was unendurable.

He was invited by the local police-sergeant to step

across to the little lock-up to interview the man Masters who was under arrest, and as Mr. Salter had not finished telephoning he crossed the village street and found the dour man in a condition of abject misery.

"I knew he'd bring me into this," he wailed, "and me with a wife and three children and not so much as a poaching case against me! Can't you speak a word for me, sir?"

Jim's sense of humor was never wholly smothered and the cool request amused him.

"I can only say that you tried to strangle me," he said. "I doubt whether that good word will be of much service to you."

"I swear I didn't mean to," pleaded the man. "He told me to put the rope round your shoulders and it slipped. How was I to know that the lady wasn't his wife who'd run away with you?"

"So that is the story he told you?" said Jim.

"Yes, sir," the man said eagerly. "I pointed out to Mr. Groat that the lady hadn't a wedding-ring, but he said that he was married all right and he was taking her to sea——"

"To sea?"

Masters nodded.

"That's what he said, sir—he said she wasn't right in her head and the sea voyage would do her a lot of good."

Jim questioned him closely without getting any further information. Masters knew nothing of the steamer on which Digby and his "wife" were to sail, or the port at which he would embark.

Outside the police-station Jim interviewed the sergeant

"I don't think this man was any more than a dupe of Groat's," he said, "and I certainly have no charge to make against him."

The sergeant shook his head.

"We must hold him until we have had the inquest on the Spaniard," he said, and then, gloomily, "To think that I had a big case like this right under my nose and hadn't the sense to see it!"

Jim smiled a little sadly.

"We have all had the case under our noses, sergeant, and we have been blinder than you!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The threat of a renewed dose of the drug had been sufficient to make Eunice acquiescent. Resistance, she knew, was useless. Digby could easily overpower her for long enough to jab his devilish needle into her arm.

She had struggled at first and had screamed at the first prick from the needle point. It was that scream Jim had heard.

"I'll go with you; I promise you I will not give you any trouble," she said. "Please don't use that dreadful thing again."

Time was pressing and it would be easier to make his escape if the girl did not resist than if she gave him trouble.

The propeller was ticking slowly round when they climbed into the fuselage.

"There is room for me, señor. There must be room for me!"

Digby looked down into the distorted face of the Spaniard who had come running after him.

"There is no room for you, Fuentes," he said. "I have told you before. You must get away as well as you can."

"I am going with you!"

To Digby's horror, the man clung desperately to the side of the fuselage. Every moment was increasing their peril, and in a frenzy he whipped out his pistol.

"Let go," he hissed, "or I'll kill you," but still the man held on.

There were voices coming from the lower path and, in his panic, Digby fired. He saw the man crumple and fall and yelled to Bronson:

"Go, go!"

Eunice, a horrified spectator, could only stare at the thing which had been Digby Groat, for the change which had come over him was extraordinary. He seemed to have shrunk in stature. His face was twisted, like a man who had had a stroke of paralysis.

She thought this was the case, but slowly he began to recover.

He had killed a man! The horror of this act was upon him, the fear of the consequence which would follow, overwhelmed him and drove him into a momentary frenzy. He had killed a man! He could have shrieked at the thought. He, who had so carefully guarded himself against punishment, who had maneuvered his associates into danger, whilst he himself stood in a safe place, was now a fugitive from a justice which would not rest until it had laid him by the heel.

And she had seen him, she, the woman at his side, and would go into the box and testify against him! And they would hang him! In that brick-lined pit



of which Jim Steele had spoken. All these thoughts flashed through his mind in a second, even before the machine left the ground, but with the rush of cold air and the inevitable exhilaration of flight, he began to think calmly again.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

**B**RONSON had killed him, that was the comfort  
ing defense. Bronson, who was now guiding  
him to safety, and who would, if necessary, give  
his life for him. Bronson should bear the onus of that  
act.

They were well up now, and the engines were a  
smooth "b'r'r!" of sound. A night wind was blowing  
and the plane rocked from side to side. It made the  
girl feel a little sick, but she commanded her brain to  
grow accustomed to the motion, and after a while, the  
feeling of nausea wore off.

They could see the sea now. The flashing signals  
of the lighthouses came from left and right. Bristol,  
a tangle of fiery spots, lay to their left, and there were  
tiny gleams of light on the river and estuary.

They skirted the northern slope of the Bristol Chan-  
nel and headed west, following the coastline. Pres-  
ently the machine turned due south, leaving behind  
them the land and its girdle of lights. Twenty min-  
utes later Bronson fired his signal pistol. A ball of  
brilliant green fire curved up and down and almost  
immediately, from the sea, came an answering signal.  
Digby strapped the girl's life-belt tighter, and saw to  
the fastening of his own.

"Fix my belt." It was Bronson shouting through  
the telephone, and Digby, leaning forward, fastened the  
life-belt about the pilot's waist. He fastened it care-

fully and added a stout strap, tying the loose end of the leather in a knot.

Down went the machine in a long glide toward the light which still burnt, and now the girl could see the outlines of the graceful yacht and the green and red lights it showed.

They made a circle, coming lower and lower every second, until they were spinning about the yacht not more than a dozen feet from the sea. Bronson shut off his engines and brought the machine upon the water, less than fifty feet from the waiting boat.

Instantly the *aéroplane* sank under them, leaving them in the sea. It was a strange sensation, thought the girl, for the water was unusually warm.

She heard a shriek and turned, and then Digby caught her hand.

"Keep close to me," he said in a whimpering voice; "you might be lost in the darkness."

She knew that he was thinking of himself. A light flared from the oncoming boat, and she looked round. In spite of herself, she asked:

"Where is the man?"

Bronson was nowhere in sight. Digby did not trouble to turn his head or answer. He reached up and gripped the gunwale of the boat and in a minute Eunice was lifted out of the water. She found herself in a small cutter which was manned by brown-faced men, whom she thought at first were Japanese.

"Where is Bronson?" she asked again in a panic, but Digby did not reply. He sat immovable, avoiding her eyes, and she could have shrieked her horror. Bronson had gone down with the *aéroplane*! The strap which Digby had fastened about his waist, he had

cunningly attached to the seat itself, and had fastened it so that it was impossible for the pilot to escape.

He was the first up the gangway on to the white deck of the yacht, and turning, he offered his hand to her.

"Welcome to the *Pealigo*," he said in his mocking voice.

Then it was not fear that had kept him silent. She could only look at him.

"Welcome to the *Pealigo*, my little bride," he said, and she knew that the man who had not hesitated to murder his two comrades in cold blood, would have no mercy on her.

A white-coated stewardess came forward, and said something in a language which Eunice did not understand. She gathered that the woman was deputed to show her the way to the cabin. Glad to be free from the association of Digby, she passed down the companion-way, through a lobby paneled in rosewood, into a cabin, the luxury of which struck her, even though her nerves were shattered, and she was incapable of taking an interest in anything outside the terrible fact that she was alone on a yacht with Digby Groat.

Extravagance had run riot here, and the Brazilian must have lavished a fortune in the decoration and appointments.

The saloon ran the width of the ship and was as deep as it was broad. Light was admitted from port-holes cunningly designed, so that they had the appearance of old-fashioned casement windows. A great divan, covered in silk, ran the length of the cabin on one side, whilst the other was occupied by a silver

bedstead, hung with rose silk curtains. Rose-shaded lights supplied the illumination, and the lamps were fashioned like torches and were held by beautiful classical figures, placed in niches about the room.

She came to the conclusion that it was a woman's room and wondered if there were any other women on board but the stewardess. She asked that woman, but apparently she knew no English, and the few words in Spanish which she had learnt did not serve her to any extent.

The suite was complete, she discovered, for behind the heavy silken curtains at the far end of the cabin there was a door which gave to a small sitting-room and a bath-room. It must be a woman's. In truth, it was designed especially by Señor Maxilla for his own comfort.

Lying on the bed was a complete change of clothing. It was brand new and complete to the last detail. Digby Groat could be very thorough.

She dismissed the woman, and bolting the door, made a complete change, for the third time since she had left Grosvenor Square.

The boat was under way now. She could feel the throb of its engines, and the slight motion that it made in the choppy sea. The *Pealigo* was one of the best sea boats afloat, and certainly one of the fastest yachts in commission.

She had finished her changing when a knock came at the door and she opened it to find Digby standing on the mat.

"You had better come and have some dinner," he said.

He was quite his old self and whatever emotions had

disturbed him were now completely under control.

She shrank back and tried to close the door, but now he was not standing on ceremony. Grasping her arm roughly he dragged her out into the passage.

"You're going to behave yourself while you're on this ship," he said. "I'm master here, and there is no especial reason why I should show you any politeness."

"You brute, you beast!" she flamed at him and he smiled.

"Don't think that because you're a woman it is going to save you anything in the way of punishment," he warned her. "Now be sensible and come along to the dining saloon."

"I don't want to eat," she said.

"You will come into the dining saloon whether you want to or not."

The saloon was empty save for the two and a dark-skinned waiter, and, like her own cabin, it was gorgeously decorated, a veritable palace in miniature, with its dangling electrolier, its flowers, and its marble mantelpiece at the far end.

The table was laid with a delicious meal, but Eunice felt she would choke if she took a morsel.

"Eat," said Digby, attacking the soup which had been placed before him.

She shook her head.

"If you don't," and his eyes narrowed, "if you don't, my good soul, I will find a way of making you eat," he said. "Remember," he put his hand in his pocket, pulled out the hateful little black case (it was wet, she noticed) and laid it on the table, "at any rate, you will be obedient enough when I use this!"

She picked up her spoon meekly and began to eat the soup, and he watched her with an amused smile.

She was surprised to find how hungry she was, and made no attempt to deny the chicken en casserole, nor the sweet that followed, but resolutely she refused to touch the wine that the steward poured out for her, and Digby did not press her.

"You're a fool, you know, Eunice." Digby lit a cigar without asking permission, and leaning back in his chair, looked at her critically. "There is a wonderful life ahead for you if you are only intelligent. Why worry about a man like Steele? A poor beggar, without a penny in the world——"

"You forget that I have no need of money, Mr. Groat," she said with spirit. Any reference to Jim aroused all that was savage in her. "I have not only the money which you have not stolen from my estate, but when you are arrested and in prison, I shall recover all that you have now, including this yacht, if it is yours."

Her answer made him chuckle.

"I like spirit," he said. "You can't annoy me, Eunice, my darling. So you like our yacht—our honeymoon yacht?" he added.

To this she made no reply.

"But suppose you realized how much I love you," he leant over and caught her hand in both of his and his eyes devoured her. "Suppose you realize that, Eunice, and knew I would give my life—my very soul—to make you happy, wouldn't that make a difference?"

"Nothing would make a difference to my feelings, Mr. Groat," she said. "The only chance you have of

earning my gratitude is to put in at the nearest port and set me ashore."

"And where do I set myself?" he asked coolly. "Be as intelligent as you are beautiful, Eunice. No, no, I shall be very glad to make you happy so long as I get a little of the happiness myself, but I do not risk imprisonment and death——" he shivered, and hated himself that he had been surprised into this symptom of fear, and hated her worse for having noticed it.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"We are bound for South America," said Digby, "and it may interest you to learn that we are following a track which is not usually taken by the South American traffic. We shall skirt Ireland and take what the mariners call the western ocean route, until we are within a thousand miles of Long Island, when we shall turn due south. By this way we avoid being sighted by the American ships and we also avoid——" the man who came in at that moment, Eunice thought must be the captain.

He wore three rings of gold about his wrist, but he was not her ideal of a seaman. Under-sized, lame in one foot, his parchment face and stiff black hair almost convinced her that this was a Japanese boat after all.

"You must meet the captain," said Digby, introducing him, "and you had better make friends with him."

Eunice thought that the chances of her making friends with that uncompromising little man were remote.

"What is it, captain?" asked Digby in Portuguese.

"We have just picked up a wireless; I thought you'd like to see it."



"I had forgotten we had wireless," said Digby as he took the message from the man's hand.

It was ill-spelt, having been written by a Brazilian who had no knowledge of English and had set down the message letter by letter as he received it. Skipping the errors of transmission, Digby read:

"To all ships westward, southward, and homeward bound. Keep a sharp lookout for the yacht *Pealigo* and report by wireless, position and bearing, to Inspector Rite, Scotland Yard."

Eunice did not understand what they were talking about, but she saw a frown settle on Digby's forehead, and guessed that the news was bad. If it was bad for him, then it was very good for her, she thought, and her spirits began to rise.

"You had better go to bed, Eunice," said Digby. "I want to talk to the captain."

She rose, and only the captain rose with her.

"Sit down," said Digby testily. "You are not here to do the honors to Mrs. Digby Groat."

She did not hear the last words, for she was out of the saloon as quickly as she could go. She went back to her own cabin, shut the door, and put up her hand to shoot home the bolt, but while she had been at dinner somebody had been busy. The bolt was removed and the key of the door was gone!

## CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

UNICE started at the door. There was no mistake. The bolts had recently been removed and the raw wood showed where the screws had been taken out.

The *Pealigo* was rolling now, and she had a difficulty in keeping her balance, but she made her way round the cabin, gathering chairs, tables, everything that was movable, and piling them up against the door. She searched the drawers of the bureau for some weapon which might have been left by its former occupant, but there was nothing more formidable than a golden-backed hair brush which the plutocratic Maxilla had overlooked.

The bathroom yielded nothing more than a long-handled brush, whilst her sitting-room made no return for her search.

She sat watching the door as the hours passed, but no attempt was made to enter the cabin. A bell rang at intervals on the deck: she counted eight. It was midnight. How long would it be before Digby Groat came?

At that moment a pale-faced Digby Groat, his teeth chattering, sat in the cabin of the wireless operator, reading a message which had been picked up. Part was in code, and evidently addressed to the Admiralty ships cruising in the vicinity, but the longer message was in plain English and was addressed:

"To the chief officers of all ships. To the Commanders of H.M. ships: to all Justices of the Peace, officers of the police Great Britain and Ireland. To all Inspectors, sub-Inspectors of the Royal Irish Constabulary:

"Arrest and detain Digby Groat, height five foot nine, stoutly built, complexion sallow, had small mustache but believed to have shaven. Speaks Spanish, French, Portuguese, and is a qualified surgeon and physician, believed to be traveling on the S.Y. *Pealigo* No. XVM. This man is wanted on a charge of willful murder and conspiracy; a reward of five thousand pounds will be paid by Messrs. Salter and Salter, Solicitors, of London, for his arrest and detention. Believe he has traveling with him, under compulsion, Dorothy Danton, age 22. Groat is a dangerous man and carries firearms."

The little captain of the *Pealigo* took the thin cigar from his teeth and regarded the gray ash attentively, though he was also looking at the white-faced man by the operator's side.

"So you see, senhor," he said suavely, "I am in a most difficult position."

"I thought you did not speak English," said Digby, finding his voice at last.

The little captain smiled.

"I read enough English to understand a reward of five thousand pounds, senhor," he said significantly. "And if I did not, my wireless operator speaks many languages, English included, and he would have explained to me, even if I had not been able to understand the message myself."

Digby looked at him bleakly.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"That depends upon what you are going to do," said

the Brazilian. "I am no traitor to my salt, and I should like to serve you, but you readily understand that this would mean a terrible thing for me, if, knowing that you were wanted by the English police, I assisted you to make an escape? I am not a stickler for small things," he shrugged his shoulders, "and Senhor Maxilla did much that I closed my eyes to. Women came into his calculations, but murder never."

"I am not a murderer, I tell you," stormed Digby vehemently, "and you are under my orders. Do you understand that?"

He jumped up and stood menacingly above the unperturbed Brazilian, and in his hand had appeared an ugly looking weapon.

"You will carry out my instructions to the letter, or, by God, you'll know all about it!"

But the captain of the *Pealigo* had returned to the contemplation of his cigar. He reminded Digby somewhat of Bronson, and the yellow-faced man shivered as at an unpleasant thought.

"It is not the first time I have been threatened with a revolver," said the captain coolly. "Years ago when I was very young, such things might have frightened me, but to-day I am not young. I have a family in Brazil who are very expensive; my pay is small, otherwise I would not follow the sea and be every man's dog to kick and bully as he wishes. If I had a hundred thousand pounds, senhor, I should settle down on a plantation which I have bought and be a happy and a silent man for the rest of my life."

He emphasized "silent," and Digby understood.

"Couldn't you do that for a little less than a hundred thousand?" he asked.

"I have been thinking the matter out very carefully. We shipmen have plenty of time to think, and that is the conclusion that I have reached, that a hundred thousand pounds would make all the difference between a life of work and a life of ease." He was silent for a moment and then went on. "That is why I hesitated about the reward. If the radio had said a hundred thousand pounds, senhor, I should have been tempted."

Digby turned on him with a snarl.

"Talk straight, will you?" he said. "You want me to pay you a hundred thousand pounds, and that is the price for carrying me to safety; otherwise you will return to port and give me up."

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"I said nothing of the sort, senhor," he said. "I merely mentioned a little private matter in which I am glad to see you take an interest. Then senhor also wishes for a happy life in Brazil with the beautiful lady he brought on board, and the senhor is not a poor man, and if it is true that the beautiful lady is an heirless, he could be richer."

The operator looked in. He was anxious to come back to his own cabin, but the captain, with a jerk of his head, sent him out again.

He dropped his voice to a tone.

"Would it not be possible for me to go to the young lady and say: 'Miss, you are in great danger, and I too am in danger of losing my liberty, what would you pay me to put a sentry outside your door; to place senhor Digby Groat in irons, in the strong room?' Do you think she would say a hundred thousand pounds, or even a half of her fortune, senhor?"

Digby was silent.

The threat was real and definite. It was not camouflaged by any fine phrases; as plainly as the little Brazilian could state his demands, he had done so.

"Very good." Digby got up from the edge of the table where he had sat, with downcast eyes, turning this and that and the other plan over in his mind. "I'll pay you."

"Wait, wait," said the captain. "Because there is another alternative that I wish to put to you, senhor," he said. "Suppose that I am her friend, or pretend to be, and offer her protection until we reach a port where she can be landed? Should we not both receive a share of the great reward?"

"I will not give her up," said Digby between his teeth. "You can cut that idea out of your head, and also the notion about putting me in irons. By God, if I thought you meant it——" he glowered at the little man, and the captain smiled.

"Who means anything in this horrible climate?" he said lazily. "You will bring the money to-morrow to my cabin, perhaps—no, no, to-night," he said thoughtfully.

"You can have it to-morrow."

The captain shrugged his shoulders; he did not insist, and Digby was left alone with his thoughts.

There was still a hope; there were two. They could not prove that he shot Fuentes, and it would be a difficult matter to pick up the yacht if it followed the course that the captain had marked for it, and in the meantime there was Eunice. His lips twisted, and the color came into his face. Eunice! He went along the deck and down the companionway, but there was a man

standing in the front of the door of the girl's cabin, a broad-shouldered, brown-faced man, who touched his cap as the owner appeared, but did not budge.

"Stand out of the way," said Digby impatiently. "I want to go into that room."

"It is not permitted," said the sailor.

Digby stepped back a pace, crimson with anger.

"Who gave orders that I should not pass?"

"The capitano," said the man.

Digby flew up the companion ladder and went in search of the captain. He found him on the bridge.

"What is this?" he began, and the captain snapped something at him in Portuguese, and Digby, looking ahead, saw a white fan-shaped light stealing along the sea.

"It is a warship, and she may be engaged in maneuvers," said the captain, "but she may also be looking for us."

He gave an order, and suddenly all the lights on the ship were extinguished. The *Pealigo* swung round in a semicircle and headed back the way she had come.

"We can make a detour and get past her," explained the captain, and Digby forgot the sentry at the door in the distress of this new danger.

Left and right wheeled the searchlight, but never once did it touch the *Pealigo*. It was searching for her, though they must have seen her lights, and now the big white ray was groping at the spot where the yacht had turned. It missed them by yards.

"Where are we going?" asked Digby fretfully.

"We are going back for ten miles, and then we'll strike between the ship and Ireland, which is there."

He pointed to the horizon, where a splash of light trembled for a second and was gone.

"We are losing valuable time," said Digby fretfully.

"It is better to lose time than to lose your liberty," said the philosophical captain.

Digby clutched the rail and his heart turned to water, as the searchlight of the warship again swung round. But fortune was with them. It might, as the captain said, be only a ship carrying out searchlight practice, but on the other hand, in view of the wireless messages which had been received, it seemed certain that the cruiser had a special reason for its scrutiny.

It was not until they were out of the danger zone that Digby remembered the mission that had brought him to the bridge.

"What do you mean by putting a man on guard outside that girl's door?" he asked.

The captain had gone to the deckhouse, and was bending over the table examining an Admiralty chart. He did not answer until Digby had repeated the question, then he looked up and straightened his back.

"The future of the lady is dependent, entirely, on the fulfillment of your promise, illustrious," he said in the flamboyant terminology of his motherland.

"But I promised——"

"You have not performed."

"Do you doubt my words?" stormed Digby.

"I do not doubt, but I do not understand," said the captain. "If you will come to my cabin I will settle with you."

Digby thought a while; his interest in Eunice had evaporated with the coming of this new danger, and



there was no reason why he should settle that night. Suppose he was captured, the money would be wasted. It would be useless to him also, but this in his parsimonious way, did not influence him.

He went down to his cabin, a smaller and less beautifully furnished one than that occupied by Eunice, and pulling an armchair to the neat little desk, he sat down to think matters over. And as the hours passed, his perspective shifted. Somehow, the danger seemed very remote, and Eunice was very near, and if any real danger came, why there would be an end of all things, Eunice included, and his money would be of no more value to him than the spray which flapped against the closed port-hole.

Beneath the bureau was a small, strong safe, and this he unlocked, taking out the broad money belt which he had fastened about his waist before he began the journey. He emptied one bulging pocket, and laid a wad of bills upon the desk. They were gold bonds of ten thousand dollar denomination, and he counted forty, put the remainder back in the pocket from whence he had taken it, and locked the belt in the safe.

It was half-past five and the gray of the new day showed through the portholes. He thrust the money in his pocket and went out to talk to the captain.

He shivered in the chill wind of morning as he stepped out on the deck and made his way for'ard. The little Brazilian, a grotesque figure, wrapped in his overcoat and muffled to the chin, was standing moodily staring across the gray waste. Without a word Digby stepped up to him and thrust the bundle of notes into his hand. The Brazilian looked at the money, counted it mechanically, and put it into his pocket.

"Your excellency is munificent," he said.

"Now take your sentry from the door," said Digby sharply.

"Wait here," said the captain and went below.

He returned in a few minutes.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

SHE had heard the tap of her first visitor at one o'clock in the morning. It had come when Digby Groat was sitting in his cabin turning over the possibilities of misfortune which the future held, and she had thought it was he.

The handle of the door turned and it opened an inch; beyond that it could not go without a crash, for the chairs and tables that Eunice had piled against it. She watched with a stony face and despair in her heart, as the opening of the door increased.

"Please do not be afraid," said a voice.

Then it was not Digby! She sprang to her feet. It might be someone worse, but that was impossible.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"It is I, the captain," said a voice in labored English.

"What is it you want?"

"I wish to speak to you, mademoiselle, but you must put away these things from behind the door, otherwise I will call two of my sailors, and it will be a simple matter to push them aside."

Already he had pried open the door to the extent of two or three inches, and with a groan Eunice realized the futility of her barricade. She dragged the furniture aside and the little captain came in smiling, hat in hand, closing the door after him.

"Permit me, mademoiselle," he said politely, and moved her aside while he replaced the furniture, then he opened the door and looked out, and Eunice saw that there was a tall sailor standing with his back to her, evidently on guard. What did this mean, she wondered? The captain did not leave her long in ignorance.

"Lady," he said in an accent which it was almost impossible to reproduce, "I am a poor sailor man who works at his hazardous calling for two hundred miserable milreis a month. But because I am poor, and of humble——" he hesitated and used the Portuguese word for origin—which she guessed at—"it does not mean that I am without a heart." He struck his breast violently. "I have a *repugnancio* to hurting female women!"

She was wondering what was coming next: would he offer to sell his master at a price? If he did, she would gladly agree, but the new hope which surged up within her was dissipated by his next words.

"My friend Groat," he said, "is my master. I must obey his orders, and if he says, 'Go to Callao,' or to Rio de Janeiro, I must go."

Her hopes sunk, but evidently he had something more to say.

"As the captain I must do as I am told," he said, "but I cannot and will not see a female hurted. You understand?"

She nodded, and the spark of hope kindled afresh.

"I myself cannot be here all the time, nor can my unconquerable sailors, to see that you are not hurted, and it would look bad for me if you were hurted—very bad!"

Evidently the worthy captain was taking a very far-sighted view of the situation, and had hit upon a compromise which relieved him at least of his responsibility toward his master.

"If the young lady will take this, remembering that José Montigano was the good friend of hers, I shall be repaid."

"This," was a silvery weapon. She took the weapon in her hand with a glad cry.

"Oh thank you, thank you, captain," she said, seizing his hand.

"Remember," he raised a warning finger. "I cannot do more. I speak now as man to woman. Presently I speak as captain to owner. You understand the remarkable difference?"

He confused her a little but she could guess what he meant.

He bowed and made his exit, but presently he returned.

"To put the chairs and tables against the door is no use," he said, shaking his head. "It is better——" he pointed significantly to the revolver, and with a broad grin closed the door behind him.

Digby Groat knew nothing of this visit: it satisfied him that the sentry had been withdrawn, and that now nothing stood between him and the woman whom, in his distorted, evil way, he loved, but her own frail strength. He tapped again. It pleased him to observe these threadbare conventions for the time being, yet when no answer came to his knock, he opened the door slowly and walked in.

Eunice was standing at the far end of the cabin; the silken curtains had been drawn aside, and the door

leading to her sitting saloon was open. Her hands were behind her and she was fully dressed.

"My dear," said Digby, in his most expansive manner, "why are you tiring your pretty eyes? You should have been in bed and asleep."

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"What else could a man want, who had such a beautiful wife, but the pleasure of her conversation and companionship," he said with an air of gayety.

"Stand where you are," she called sharply as he advanced, and the authority in her tone made him halt.

"Now, Eunice," he said shaking his head, "you are making a lot of trouble when trouble is foolish. You have only to be sensible, and there is nothing in the world that I will not give you."

"There is nothing in the world that you have to give, except the money which you have stolen from me," she said calmly. "Why do you talk of giving, when I am the giver, and there is nothing for you to take but my mercy?"

He stared at her, stricken dumb by the coolness at the moment of her most deadly danger, and then with a laugh he recovered his self-possession and strolled towards her, his dark eyes aflame.

"Stand where you are," said Eunice again, and this time she had the means to enforce her command.

Digby could only stare at the muzzle of the pistol pointed toward his heart, and then he shrank back.

"Put that thing away!" he said harshly. "Damn you, put it away! You are not used to firearms and it may explode."

"It will explode," said Eunice. Her voice was deep and intense, and all the resentment she had smothered

poured forth in her words. "I tell you, Digby Groat, that I will shoot you like a dog, and glory in the act. Shoot you more mercilessly than you killed that poor Spaniard, and look upon your body with less horror than you showed."

"Put it away, put it away! Where did you get it?" he cried. "For God's sake, Eunice, don't fool with that pistol, you don't want to kill me, do you?"

"There are times when I want to kill you very badly," she said, and lowered the point of the revolver at the sight of the man's abject cowardice.

He wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief, and she could see his knees trembling.

"Who gave you that pistol?" he demanded violently. "You didn't have it when you left Kennett Hall, that I'll swear. Where did you find it? In one of those drawers?" He looked at the bureau, one of the drawers of which was half open.

"Does it matter?" she asked. "Now, Mr. Groat, you will please go out of my cabin and leave me in peace."

"I had no intention of hurting you," he growled. He was still very pale. "There was no need for you to flourish your revolver so melodramatically. I only came in to say good-night."

"You might have come about six hours earlier," she said. "Now go."

"Listen to me, Eunice," said Digby Groat; he edged forward but her pistol covered him, and he jumped. "If you're going to play the fool, I'll go," he said, and followed the action by the deed, slamming the door behind him.

She heard the outer door open and close, and leant

against the brass column of the bed for support, for she was near to the end of her courage. She must sleep, she thought, but first she must secure the outer door. There was a lock on the lobby door; she had not noticed that before. She had hardly taken two steps through the cabin door before an arm was flung around her, she was pressed back, and a hand gripped the wrist which still carried the weapon. With a wrench he flung it to the floor, and in another moment she was in his arms.

"You thought I'd gone," he lifted her still struggling and carried her back to the saloon. "I want to see you," he breathed. "To see your face, your glorious eyes, that wonderful mouth of yours, Eunice." He pressed his lips against hers; he smothered with kisses her cheeks, her neck, her eyes.

She felt herself slipping from consciousness; the very horror of his caresses froze and paralyzed her will to struggle. She could only gaze at the eyes so close to hers, fascinated as by the glare of the deadly snake.

"You are mine now, mine, do you hear?" he murmured into her ear. "You will forget Jim Steele, forget everything, except that I adore you," and then he saw her wild gaze pass him to the door, and turned.

The little captain stood there, his hands on his hips, watching, his brown face a mask.

Digby released his hold of the girl, and turned on the sailor.

"What the hell are you doing here? Get out," he almost screamed.

"There is an aëroplane looking for us," said the captain. "We have just picked up her wireless."



Digby's jaw dropped. That possibility had not occurred to him.

"Who is she? What does the wireless say?"

"It is a message we picked up saying, 'Nothing sighted. Am heading due south.' It gave her position," added the captain, "and if she is coming due south I think Mr. Steele will find us."

Digby fell back a pace, his face blanched.

"Steele," he gasped.

The captain nodded.

"That is the gentleman who signs the message. I think it would be advisable for you to come on deck."

"I'll come on deck when I want," growled Digby. There was a devil in him now. He was at the end of his course, and he was not to be thwarted.

"Will the good gentleman come on deck?"

"I will come later. I have some business to attend to here."

"You can attend to it on deck," said the little captain calmly.

"Get out," shouted Digby.

The captain's hand did not seem to move; there was a shot, the deafening explosion of which filled the cabin, and a panel behind Digby's head splintered into a thousand pieces.

He glared at the revolver in the Brazilian's hand, unable to realize what had happened.

"I could have shot you just as easily," said the Brazilian calmly, "but I preferred to send the little bullet near your ear. Will you come on deck, please?"

Digby Groat obeyed.

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

**W**HITE and breathless he leant against the bulwark glowering at the Brazilian, who had come between him and the woman whose ruin he had planned.

"Now," he said, "you will tell me what you mean by this, you swine!"

"I will tell you many things that you will not like to hear," said the captain.

A light dawned upon Digby.

"Did you give the girl that revolver?"

The Brazilian nodded.

"I desired to save you from yourself, my friend," he said. "In an hour the gentleman Steele will be within sight of us; I can tell where he is within a few miles. Do you wish that he should come on board and discover that you have added something to murder that is worse than murder?"

"That is my business," said Digby Groat, breathing so quickly that he felt he would suffocate unless the pent up rage in him found some vent.

"And mine," said the captain, tapping him on the chest. "I tell you, my fine fellow, that that is my business also, for I do not intend to live within an English gaol. It is too cold in England and I would not survive one winter. No, my fine fellow, there is only one thing to do. It is to run due west in the hope that we escape the observation of the airship man; if we do not, then we are——" he snapped his fingers.

"Do as you like," said Digby, and turning abruptly walked down to his cabin.

He was beaten, and the end was near. He took from a drawer a small bottle of colorless liquid, and emptied its contents into a glass. This he placed in a rack conveniently to his hand. The effect would not be violent. One gulp, and he would pass to sleep and there the matter would end for him. That was a comforting thought to Digby Groat. If they escaped!—His mind turned to Eunice. She could wait; perhaps they would dodge through all these guards that the police had put, and they would reach that land for which he yearned. He could not expect the captain, after receiving the wireless messages of warning, to take the risks. He was playing for safety, thought Digby, and did not wholly disapprove of the man's attitude.

When they were on the high seas away from the ocean traffic, the little Brazilian would change his attitude, and then—Digby nodded. The captain was wise; it would have been madness on his part to force the issue so soon.

Eunice could not get away; they were moving in the same direction to a common destination, and there were weeks, hot and sunny weeks, when they could sit under the awning on this beautiful yacht and talk. He would be rational and drop that cave-man method of wooing. A week's proximity and freedom from restraint might make all the difference in the world, if—There was a big if, he recognized. Steele would not rest until he had found him, but by that time Eunice might be a complacent partner.

He felt a little more cheerful, locked away the glass

and its contents in a cupboard, and strolled up to the deck. He saw the ship now for the first time in daylight, and it was a model of what a yacht should be. The deck was snowy white; every piece of brass work glittered, the coiled sheets looked to have been dipped in chalk, and under that identical awning great basket chairs awaited him invitingly.

He glanced round the horizon; there was no ship in sight. The sea sparkled in the rays of the sun, and over the white wake of the steamer lay a deep black pall of smoke, for the *Pealigo* was racing forward at twenty-two knots an hour. The captain, at any rate, was not playing him false. He was heading west, judged Digby.

Far away on the right was an irregular purple strip, the line of the Irish coast; the only traffic they would meet now, he considered, was the western bound steamers on the New York route. But the only sign of a steamer was a blob of smoke on the far off eastern horizon.

The chairs invited him, and he sat down and stretched his legs luxuriously.

Yes, this was a better plan, he thought, and as his mind turned again to Eunice, she appeared at the head of the companion way. At first she did not see him, and walking to the rail, seemed to be breathing in the beauties of the morning.

How exquisite she looked! He did not remember seeing a woman who held herself as she did. The virginal purity of her face, the glory of her coloring, the svelte woman figure of her—they were worth waiting for, he told himself again.

She turned her head and saw him and made a movement as though she were going back to her cabin, but he beckoned to her, and to his surprise, she walked slowly toward him.

"Don't get up," she said coldly. "I can find a chair myself. I want to speak to you, Mr. Groat."

"You want to speak to me," he said in amazement, and she nodded.

"I have been thinking that perhaps I can induce you to turn this yacht about and land me in England."

"Oh you have, have you?" he said sharply. "What inducement can you offer other than your gracious self?"

"Money," she answered. "I do not know by what miracle it has happened, but I believe I am an heiress, and worth——" she hesitated, "a great deal of money. If that is the case, Mr. Groat, you are poor."

"I'm not exactly a pauper," he said apparently amused. "What are you offering me?"

"I'm offering you half my fortune to take me back to England," she said.

"And what would you do with the other half of your fortune?" he mocked her. "Save me from the gallows? No, no, my young friend, I have committed myself too deeply to make your plan even feasible. I'm not going to bother you again, and I promise you I will wait until we have reached our destination before I ask you to share my lot. I appreciate your offer and I daresay it is an honest one," he went on, "but I have gone too far literally and figuratively to turn back. You hate me now, but that feeling will change."

"It will never change," she said as she rose. "But

I see that I am wasting my time with you," and with a little nod, she would have gone had he not caught her hand, and drawn her back.

"You love somebody else, I suppose?"

"That is an impertinence," she said. "You have no right to question me."

"I am not questioning you, I am merely making a statement which is beyond dispute. You love somebody else, and that somebody is Jim Steele." He leant forward. "You can make up your mind for this, that sooner than give you to Jim Steele, I will kill you. Is that plain?"

"It is the kindest thing you have said," she smiled contemptuously as she rose.

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

A LITTLE smudge of smoke far away to the south sent Jim Steele racing away on a fool's errand, for the ship proved to be nothing more interesting than a fruit boat which had ignored his wireless inquiry because the only man who operated the instrument was asleep in his bunk. Jim saw the character of the ship when he was within two miles of it and banked over cutting a diagonal course north west.

Once or twice he glanced back at his "passenger" but Inspector Maynard was thoroughly at home and apparently comfortable.

Jim was growing anxious. At the longest he could not keep in the air for more than four hours, and two of those precious hours were already gone. He must leave himself sufficient "juice" to make the land and this new zig-zag must not occupy more than half-an-hour.

He had purposely taken the machine to a great height to enlarge his field of vision and that meant a still further burden upon his limited supply of petrol.

He was almost despairing when he saw in the far distance a tiny white arrow of foam—the ship whose wake it was he could not see. His hand strayed to the key of his little wireless and he sent a message quivering through the ether. There was no response. He waited

a minute and again the key clattered and clicked. Again a silence and he flashed an angry message. Then through his ear pieces he heard a shrill wail of sound—the steamer was responding.

“What ship is that?”

He waited, never doubting that he would learn it was some small merchant vessel. There was a whine and then:

“P-E-A-L-I-G-O,” was the reply.

\* \* \* \* \*

Digby had gone forward to see what the men were doing who were swung over the side. He was delighted to discover that they were painting out the word *Pealigo* and were substituting *Malaga*.

He went up to the captain in his most amiable mood.

“That is a good thought of yours,” he said, “changing the name, I mean.”

The captain nodded.

“By your orders, of course,” he said.

“Of course,” smiled Digby, “by my orders.”

All the time he was standing there chatting to the Brazilian he noticed that the man constantly turned his eyes to the north, scanning the sky.

“You don’t think that the aëroplane will come so far out, do you? How far are we from the coast?”

“We are a hundred and twelve miles from the English coast,” said the skipper, “and that isn’t any great distance for a seaplane.”

Digby with unusual joviality slapped him on the back.



"You are getting nervous," he said. "He won't come now."

A man had come on to the bridge whom Digby recognized as the wireless operator. He handed a message to the captain, and he saw the captain's face change.

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

Without a word the man handed the written slip:

"Ship heading south, send me your name and number."

"Who is it from?" asked Digby, startled at this voice from nowhere.

The captain, supporting his telescope against a stanchion, scanned the northern skies.

"I see nothing," he said with a frown. "Possibly it came from one of the land stations; there is no ship in sight."

"Let us ask him who he is," said Digby.

The three went back to the wireless room and the operator adjusted his ear pieces. Presently he began writing, after a glance up at the captain, and Digby watched, fascinated, the movements of the pencil.

"Heave to. I am coming aboard you."

"What does it mean?" said Digby.

The captain went out on the deck and again made a careful examination of the sky.

"I can't understand it," he said.

"The signal was close, senhor captain—it was less than three miles away," broke in the operator.

The captain rubbed his nose.

"I had better stop," he said.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," stormed Digby. "You'll go on until I tell you to stop."

They returned to the bridge, and the captain stood with one hand on the telegraph, undecided.

And then right ahead of them, less than half a mile away, something fell into the water with a splash.

"What was that?" said Digby.

He was answered immediately. From the place where the splashing had occurred arose a great mass of billowing smoke which sped along the sea, presenting an impenetrable veil. Smoke was rising from the sea to their right, and the captain, shading his eyes, looked up. Directly over them it seemed was a silvery shape, so small as to be almost invisible if the sun had not caught the wing tips and painted them silver.

"This, my friend," said the captain, "is where many things happen." He jerked over the telegraph to stop.

"What is it?" asked Digby.

"It was a smoke bomb, and I prefer a smoke bomb half a mile away to a real bomb on my beautiful ship," said the captain.

For a moment Digby stared at him, and then with a scream of rage he sprang at the telegraph and thrust it over to full-ahead. Immediately he was seized from behind by two sailors, and the captain brought the telegraph back to its original position.

"You will signal to the senhor aviator, to whom you have already told the name of the ship, if you have obeyed my orders," he said to the operator, "and say that I have put Mr. Digby Groat in irons!"

And five minutes later this statement was nearly true.

Down from the blue dropped that silvery dragon fly, first sweeping round the stationary vessel in great

circles until it settled like a bird upon the water close to the yacht's side.

The captain had already lowered a boat, and whilst they were fixing the shackles on a man who was behaving like a raving madman in his cabin below, Jim Steele came lightly up the side of the ship and followed the captain down the companionway.

Above the rumble of the yacht's machinery Eunice had heard the faint buzz of the descending seaplane, but had been unable to distinguish it until the yacht stopped, then she heard it plainly enough and ran to the port-hole, pulling aside the silk curtain.

Yes, there it was, a buzzing insect of a thing, that presently passed out of sight on the other side. What did it mean? What did it mean, she wondered. Was it—and then the door flew open and a man stood there. He was without collar or waistcoat, his hair was rumpled, his face bleeding, and one link of a steel handcuff was fastened about his wrist. It was Digby Groat, and his face was the face of a devil.

She shrank back against the bed as he came stealthily toward her, the light of madness in his eyes, and then somebody else came in, and he swung round to meet the cold, level scrutiny of Jim Steele.

With a yell like a wild beast, Digby sprang at the man he hated, but the whirling steel of the manacle upon his hand never struck home. Twice Jim hit him, and he fell an inert heap on the ground. In another second Eunice was in her lover's arms, sobbing her joy upon the breast of his leather jacket.



**THE SINISTER MAN**



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# THE SINISTER MAN

## CHAPTER I

### A PROPOSAL

"You have beauty," said Mr. Maurice Tarn carefully; "you have youth. You will in all probability survive me by many years. I am not the kind of man who would object to your marrying again. That would be sheer selfishness, and I am not selfish. When I die you will have great property; while I live you shall enjoy my wealth to its full. Possibly you have never looked upon me in the light of a husband, but it is not unusual for a guardian to marry his ward, and the disparity in our ages is not an insuperable obstacle."

He spoke like one who was reciting a carefully rehearsed speech, and Elsa Marlowe listened, stunned.

If the old-fashioned sideboard had of its own volition stood on end, if Elgin Crescent had been suddenly transported to the suburbs of Bagdad, she could not have been more astounded. But Elgin Crescent was in Bayswater, and the gloomy dining room of Maurice Tarn's maisonnette remained undisturbed; and here was Maurice Tarn himself, sitting on the other side of the breakfast table, an unshaven, shabby man of fifty-six, whose trembling hand, that went automatically to his shaggy gray mustache, was an eloquent reminder of his last night's carouse—there were three empty bottles on the table of his study

when she looked in that morning—and he was proposing marriage.

She could only gaze at him open-eyed, scarcely believing the evidence of her senses.

"I suppose you think I am mad," he went on slowly. "I've given a lot of thought to it, Elsa. You are heart-free, as I know. There is no reason in the world, except—except the difference in our ages, why this should not be."

"But—but, Mr. Tarn," she stammered, "I had no idea. Of course it is impossible!"

Was he still drunk, she wondered, without a tremor of apprehension. For fifteen years of association with Maurice Tarn had not tended to increase her awe for him; if she had not been so staggered by this proposal, which had come like a bolt from the blue, she might have been amused.

"I don't want to marry you—I don't want to marry anybody. It is very—very kind of you, and of course I feel"—she could hardly bring her lips to say the word—"honored. But it is too ridiculous!" she burst forth.

His tired eyes were watching her, and he did not even flinch at the word.

"I'm going away—to—somewhere. I've got to go away for my health. Since Major Amery has come into the firm, it is impossible to continue."

"Does Ralph know this—that you're going away?" she asked, curiosity overcoming her amazement.

"No!" He almost shouted the word. "He doesn't—he mustn't know! You understand, Elsa? Under no circumstances must Ralph know. What I have said to you is confidential. Think it over."

With a gesture he dismissed the subject, to her great relief. For fully ten minutes she sat staring out of the window. Mr. Maurice Tarn's dining room looked out

upon the garden of Elgin Crescent, a garden common to all the houses that backed upon it. It was not a garden in the strictest sense of the word, being no more than a stretch of worn grass, intersected by brown paths; and its chief value was best appreciated by the parents of very small children. On sunny days the shade of the big tree in the center of the garden was a favorite resting place for the maids and their tiny charges. At this hour the garden was deserted. The yellow sunlight slanting through the big window, lit a diagonal patch on the table, and gave to the spring flowers, that, by a movement of her chair, mercifully hid Mr. Maurice Tarn from her view, the glory which belonged to them.

She stole a glance at him past the flowery screen. He was wearing yesterday's collar—he invariably made a collar last three days; and his rusty black cravat was fastened behind with a tarnished buckle. The lapels of his ancient frock coat shone with much wear; his cuffs showed ragged threads. Speculatively she examined him in the light of a possible bridegroom and shuddered.

Elsa had preserved toward her guardian and his habits an attitude of philosophical patience. She had grown tired of urging the purchase of clothes. He had a fairly good income, and once she had surprised the information that he had a substantial balance at his bank. But by nature and habits he was miserly. She owed him something, but not much: an education at the cheapest boarding school he could find; a dress allowance reluctantly given; an annual holiday at Clacton; a fortnight in a crowded business school; and a postgraduate course in shorthand and typewriting, which was to fit her for the position of a private secretary to old Amery. In addition to these things Maurice Tarn gave her what he was pleased to call "a home."

She had often wondered what freak of generosity had

induced him to adopt the orphan child of a distant cousin, but the nearest she had ever reached to explaining that fit of altruism was when he told her one evening that he hated complete loneliness and preferred a child in the house to a dog.

He was apparently absorbed in the deviled chicken he was cutting into microscopic pieces, for presently he asked:

"Is there anything in the paper?"

He himself never read the newspapers, and it had been part of her duty for years to supply him with the principal items of the morning's news.

"Nothing," she said. "You know about the parliamentary crisis?"

He growled something under his breath and asked:

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing, except the drug scandal," she said.

He looked up suddenly. "Drug scandal? What do you mean?"

She picked up the newspaper from the floor where she had dropped it.

"It is about two gangs that are importing drugs into this country. I didn't think you'd be interested in that," she said, searching for the paragraph.

She happened at that moment to look across at him, and she nearly dropped the paper in her surprise. Mr. Maurice Tarn's complexion was one of consistent sallowness, but now his face was a deathly white. His jaw had dropped, and his eyes were staring.

"Two gangs?" he croaked. "What do you mean? Read it, read it!" he commanded huskily.

"I thought——" she began.

"Never mind what you thought—read it!" snarled Tarn.

Masking her astonishment, she found the item. It was a half column on the top of the principal page.

Yesterday morning Detective Inspector Bickerson, accompanied by half a dozen police officers, made a raid upon a small warehouse in Whitechapel and, after arresting the caretaker, conducted a search of the premises. It is understood that a considerable quantity of opium and a package containing sixteen pounds of cocaine were seized and removed. It is believed that the warehouse was a distributing center used by one of the two gangs which are engaged in putting illicit drugs upon the market, both here and in America. The police believe that one of these nefarious associations is conducted by a Japanese merchant named Soyoka, who, however, is the mere figurehead in the business, the operations being carried out by a number of unknown men, said to occupy good social positions, and two of whom are believed to be officials in the Indian civil service. The composition of the second gang, which, during the past two years has amassed a considerable fortune, is not so well known. Behind these two organizations are hundreds of agents, and a small army of desperadoes are employed to cover the gangs' workings. The recent arrest of a Greek in Cleveland, Ohio, and his confession to the Federal authorities, has enabled Scotland Yard to get a line on the British branch of the "business." From the statement of the Greek, Poropoulos, it is believed that the heads of the second gang include an English doctor and a leading merchant of the City of London.

"Ah!"

It was not a groan; it was not a sigh; but it combined the quality of both. Elsa looked up and saw her guardian's head sinking over the table, and she sprang to her feet.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

He waved her aside. "Get me some brandy—in the

cupboard of my study," he mumbled, and she hurried into the stuffy little room, returning with a tumbler half filled, the contents of which he swallowed at a gulp. Slowly the color came back to his face, and he forced a smile.

"You're responsible," he grunted, with heavy pleasantry. "A fellow of my age doesn't propose at this time of the morning without feeling the effects—eh? A little too old for love-making, I guess. Think it over, Elsa. I've been a good friend of yours."

"Do you want me to read any more?"

He stopped her with a gesture. "Stuff! A newspaper invention! These fellows are always out for sensation; they live on it." He rose to his feet with an effort.

"I shall see you at the office," he said. "Think it over, Elsa!"

The door of his study slammed behind him, and he was still in his locked room when the girl boarded an east-bound bus that carried her almost to the door of the Amery corporation.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HOUSE OF AMERY

THE house of Amery & Amery stands where it stood in the days when its founder marshaled his apprentices and clerks to fight the great fire of London; so that, when the holocaust had smoldered to ashes, the cramped old house alone raised its head amidst the blackened ruins of Wood Street. Improvements had come with the years, an exigent city council had demanded certain structural alterations, but in appearance the Amery building remained what it was in the days when the *Mayflower* set forth from Plymouth Harbor and narrowly missed fouling the *Pleasant Endeavour*, the first of the Amery Brothers' fleet of East Indiamen.

The centuries had seen many fluctuations in the fortunes of the house. One evening at White's, in the days of the Regency, an Amery had dined the fleet out of existence; later another Amery had won back its equivalent in the tea trade; but the narrow-fronted house, with its uneven floors, its poky little cupboards and presses, its low ceilings and tortuous stairways, defied the passage of time.

Above the thick green glass window-panes that admitted light and distorted vision, the faded inscription "Amery & Amery, Shippers & Importers" appeared in the identical lettering that an Amery had chosen on the day George the third went to his rest. The little room, where Elsa Marlowe attended to the private correspondence of the newest proprietor, had been furnished in his youth by

a chief clerk who, as an old man, had seen the first policeman on the streets of London.

Elsa, sitting before her worn writing table one morning in late spring, when the sunlight poured into the room, seemed as much out of place in the grim setting as the little bunch of lilies of the valley she had arranged in a cheap glass vase beside the typewriter.

There was a sculptor in Paris who speculated in dainty statuettes of slim Parisiennes, and she might have posed for M. Milliere, a straight-backed, long-limbed girl, with the tilted chin, the straight nose, the large, inquiring eyes, and the confusion of spun-gold hair he loved.

She had that complexion which made wise and skeptical women look twice at her; yet her pink and white owed nothing to artifice, and the rich red of her mouth was as everlasting as the deep gray-blue of her eyes.

Her forehead was puckered, as she listened to her voluble companion. She was never quite comfortable when Miss Dame came to her favorite topic of discussion, though the gaunt woman expressed much that she thought.

Elsa Marlowe was not prepared to accept Miss Dame's judgment on any other subject than stenography. Her views on human affairs were inclined to be colored by the peculiar brand of romance she had absorbed overnight. But when she described the house of Amery & Amery as "creepy" and spoke of Paul Roy Amery as a "sinister figure," Elsa found herself ranged on the side of Romance.

"You can laugh about the pitchers," said Miss Dame earnestly, "but you get ideas of life out of 'em—types, characters—if you understand me? It's experience to a young girl like me. The villains I've seen! My word! But I've never seen anybody like the major. Sinister!



You've only to look at him, Miss Marlowe. And why your dear, good uncle, the finest gentleman that ever breathed, should let you stay in this place, is more'n I can understand. See what I mean?"

Miss Dame glared fearfully through her big rimless spectacles, her large mouth grotesquely open, her little button of a nose redder than ever. She was tall, round-shouldered, awkwardly made. Her hands and feet were large; her bobbed hair, refusing to behave as bobbed hair should, spread like a fan from her head.

"I wouldn't call him 'sinister,'" said Elsa thoughtfully: "he is certainly unpleasant. I don't think he is used to dealing with white people."

"That's what I say," broke in Miss Dame. "Negroes, and black people an' Injuns! I'll bet he lashes 'em to death. Anyway, he's sinister," said Miss Dame firmly, "and so is this building, hundreds of years old. There ain't a floor that's level, or a door that fits; and look at the poky little windows and the beams over the ceiling! And there's no proper washing place, and in the heart of the city, too! Where did he come from, anyway? Old Mr. Amery never said he had a nephew, and your dear uncle was that surprised when the will was read that he could have dropped. He told me so himself."

For the moment her "dear uncle" was as unpleasant a subject as the sinister Mr. Amery. It was accepted by the employees of Amery's that Mr. Tarn and she were uncle and niece, and she never attempted to correct that erroneous impression.

"We shall get used to him," she said with a half sigh. "New people are always awkward at first, and probably he isn't used to business. He had an official position in India. I know that——"

She stopped. Here she was going beyond the bounds

of propriety. She could not tell of the mysterious letters which Paul Amery dictated, letters in which whole lines were made up of unintelligible code words.

"Mr. Tarn knows something about him," Miss Dame nodded vigorously. "They were together *hours* yesterday—I heard 'em! Gee, the noise they made!"

Elsa turned startled eyes to the other. "Quarreling?" she said incredulously.

"Quarreling!" repeated Miss Dame triumphantly. "You never heard anything like it! It was when you were out at lunch. When I say 'hours,' I mean twenty minutes. I never saw your dear uncle so upset in my life."

Elsa was not impressed. Mr. Maurice Tarn was easily upset in these days. Was she responsible for that, she thought whimsically. But a quarrel? Why should Amery quarrel with his general manager? They hardly knew one another, for Paul Amery had not occupied the presidential chair a month as yet, was new to the business, and scarcely acquainted with its routine.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

Before Miss Dame could answer, a bell shrilled, and Elsa hastily gathered her notebook and pencil and passed into the lair of the president.

It was a pleasant room, carpeted in a dull blue that showed the polished black paneling to advantage. Over an old fireplace, a solemn-faced clock ticked sedately. The leaden windows were curtained with dark-blue velvet; the only touch of gay color in the room was the scarlet leather of the fender and seats.

The man at the big writing table was glowering at a letter on his blotting pad and, seemingly oblivious to her presence, was reading it over to himself, his thin lips moving silently, as he assimilated every line, every word. A minute passed, and then Paul Amery looked up with

that expression on his saturnine face which never failed to rouse in her breast something that was akin to fury. Not that he was consciously offensive; her resentment would have been excusable if he were.

There was just the faintest hint of a sneer, a downward droop of the corners of his mouth that coincided with the lift of his upper lip and a something—a cold, appraising something—in his blue eyes that was altogether and yet indefinitely insulting.

She had surprised that expression before. Invariably it followed upon the interruption of a reverie. And Paul Amery's daydreams were not pleasant. Only for a second did that twisted smile disfigure his thin, dark face. In another second it set like a mask of fate, except that the black brows had met in a frown that hardened and almost dehumanized him.

"Yes?"

His voice had the quality of granite. Instantly he had passed through the stage of transition between dreams and reality, and his eyes were searching hers suspiciously. There were people who would think he was good looking, she thought, and she was sufficient of a woman to concede this advantage to him. The hot sun of India had tanned his face to a permanent brown; it had given him, too, something of the character of the jungle beasts he had stalked. She never saw him come noiselessly, almost furtively, through the outer office without thinking of a cat.

"Yes?"

He never raised his voice; he did not display his impatience, but his "Yes?" was like the flick of a whip in her face.

"You rang for me, and you wished to see the bills of lading—Chi Fung and Lee, Mr. Amery," she stammered and despised herself for her deference.

Without a word he reached out his hand and took the

papers she had brought to him. Silently he examined them and then put them aside.

"Why are you afraid of me?"

The question stunned her; it was so unexpected, so utterly unanswerable that she could only stand and stare at him until, before the masterful blaze of his eyes, she lowered her own.

"I'm not afraid of you, Mr. Amery," she said and tried hard to keep her voice level. "What a queer thing to say! I'm—I'm not afraid of anybody." This defiantly.

He did not speak. His very silence gave her the lie as plainly as if he had spoken.

"Besides," she went on with the ghost of a smile, "isn't it the proper attitude of a secretary toward her employer? A wholesome respect——"

She finished lamely, feeling a fool. He was looking through the window into the dusty sunlight of Wood Street. Apparently his attention was absorbed in the laden trucks that lined the narrow road; in the red-faced policeman who was engineering a passage for a steam trolley; in the drab face of the office block opposite—in anything but one pink and white girl, with a mop of fine, brown hair that defied regulation.

"You are five feet three inches," he said, going off at a tangent. "Sixty-three inches! The little finger of your left hand is crooked. You must have broken it when you were a child. You live constantly in association with somebody who is deaf; your voice is just a little too strong. Of course, Mr. Maurice Tarn! I have noticed that he is deaf."

Elsa drew a long breath.

"Shall I leave the bills of lading, please?" she asked.

His eyes were no longer on her face. They had dropped moodily to the blotter.

"No, I wanted you. Take this letter to Fing Li T'sin,

796 Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai. '*Tang Chiang chin ping ch'ang*——' I beg your pardon, you do not understand Chinese, of course?"

He was not joking. She saw him flush with annoyance at his mistake—at the possibility that she might think he was being funny at her expense.

"He reads and speaks English better than you or I, for the matter of that," he added hurriedly. "Take this. 'I am looking for a trustworthy man to cover the Nang-poo province. Feng Ho has arrived. You may send letters to him here. When you see the Long Sword of Sun Yat tell him——'"

Here he paused and passed a slip of paper across to her. Carefully penciled in capital letters were the words: "Barrow Tendency Makeshift Warlike Candle Stencil Pendant Maple Crest Hamlet Desire."

He was looking at her, as she read, a thin hand caressing the little black mustache that covered his upper lip, and, as she raised her head, she met his glance and went hot.

"Nice job, this?" he asked absently. "Not too much work? Wages good?"

It was the first time he had displayed the slightest interest in her. Hitherto she had had the feeling that he had regarded her as part of the movable fixtures of the establishment.

"Yes, it is a good job," she said awkwardly and added—fatuously, as she told herself—"I hope my work is satisfactory?"

He did not answer, and she added boorishness to his sins.

"You knew my great-uncle, Bertram Amery, of course?"

He was not looking at her; his eyes were still on the street below.

"Slightly," she said. "I was here during the last few

months of his life. He only came in for a few minutes each day."

He nodded slowly.

"The ancient ran the business, of course?"

"The ancient?" She frowned and then realized that his flippant reference was to Mr. Maurice Tarn. "Mr. Tarn has always helped to run the business," she said, a little stiffly, though Heaven knew she was in no mood to feel offended because he spoke slightly of her very distant relative.

"Mr. Tarn always helped to run the business," he repeated absently and then jerked his head round to face her. "Thank you, that will do," he said.

She was at the door, when his voice arrested her.

"How much does the Stanford Corporation pay you?" he asked.

She turned round, staring at him in wonder.

"The Stanford Corporation, Mr. Amery?"

His keen eyes searched her face.

"I'm sorry," he said simply. "I see you do not know that enterprising business."

He nodded to the door, and she was back at her desk before she realized the indignity of her dismissal.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MENACE OF SOYOKA

What did he mean? Stanford Corporation! Did he suggest that she was secretly working for some other house? If she had been on better terms with her uncle she might have solved the puzzle; but for the moment their relationship was more than a little strained.

She was typing the letter when she heard the door of her room open and close, and, looking up, she saw the tall, hollow-eyed man whom she had particularly wished to avoid that day.

He stood for a while, fingering his bristling gray mustache, his small, faded eyes fixed moodily upon her, and then he came slowly across the room and towered above her. He was an unusually tall man, and, for the general manager of a prosperous business, shabbily attired. His cuffs were ragged at the ends, his black cravat rusty with age.

"Where's Amery?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"In his room, Mr. Tarn."

"Humph!" He fingered his bristly chin. "Did he say anything?"

"About what?"

"About anything?" he asked impatiently.

She shook her head. It was in her mind to tell him about Major Amery's inquiry, but she could not bring herself to the point of taking him into her confidence.

"Have you thought over the matter I spoke about this morning?"

He stole a quick glance at her and read her answer before she spoke.

"No, it—it doesn't bear thinking about."

He blinked at her, and his face twisted to an expression of pain.

"Too old, I suppose? I'll make any arrangement you like, only I want company. I hate being alone. I want somebody I can talk to—a wife—somebody I know and can trust. I've got to get things off my mind. They can't make a wife tell—you understand? Any arrangement," he emphasized the words, and she grasped his meaning. But he was not looking at her, as he spoke. That "any arrangement" promise was a lie. He wanted more than a trustworthy listener.

She drew a long, impatient sigh.

"We needn't go back to that, need we?" she asked. "I wish you wouldn't, Mr. Tarn. It worries me terribly, and I know it is going to make life insupportable."

He was still fingering his chin nervously, his eyes straying to the door of Paul Amery's room.

"Is anything wrong?"

He shook his head irritably. "Wrong? What should there be wrong?" He glanced apprehensively toward the door. "I'm going in to see him."

There was a note of defiance in his voice which surprised her. She had not seen this side of Maurice Tarn's character. She knew him best as a most self-possessed business man without imagination. At his worst he was a slovenly domestic tyrant, with a passion for secret drinking. Yet here he was, bracing himself, as for a great ordeal, the hand that touched his mustache trembling, his eyes fearful.

"I've got to go away." His voice was lowered. "I don't know where, but—but—somewhere."

He heard the turn of the handle and looked round



affrighted. Paul Amery stood in the doorway, that hateful smile of his upon his thin lips.

"I—I wanted to see you, Major Amery."

Without a word Paul Amery opened the door a little further, and his general manager went in. Amery closed the door behind him and walked slowly to his desk. He did not sit down, but stood, his hands in his pockets, his head slightly bent forward, his cold eyes scrutinizing the man.

"Well?"

Twice the lips of the older man moved, and presently, in a half-unreal voice, he spoke.

"I feel I owe you an apology for that—that scene which occurred yesterday, Major Amery. I fear I lost my temper; but you can quite understand that one who has held a trusted position in the house of Amery, who was respected, I venture to say, by your uncle——"

"Sit down."

Mechanically the man obeyed.

"Mr. Tarn, I'm new to this business. I ought to have come over eight months ago, when my uncle died, and the property passed into my possession. There were certain things that I did not realize, but which I realize now. I looked upon Amery & Amery as a corporation that could get along very well without me. I never looked upon Amerys as an enemy I should have to fight."

Maurice Tarn stared at him. "Fight? I don't understand you. An enemy, Major Amery?" he said tremulously.

"Who is the Stanford Corporation?"

The question rang out like a pistol shot, and Mr. Tarn winced, but did not answer.

"There is a business being carried on in a block of offices in Threadneedle Street," said Amery slowly; "not a very flourishing business, for the Stanford Corporation

occupy one large room and employ no clerks. All the work is done by a mysterious individual who comes after most of the other offices are closed, and he leaves just before midnight. He types his own letters, of which he keeps no copies; he has interviews with strange and disreputable people; and, although the name of the Stanford Corporation does not appear in the books of Amery & Amery, I am satisfied that our very reputable business"—his lips curled again—"built up by the labor of years and founded on the honesty and integrity of my dead relatives, is a screen behind which a certain traffic is in progress."

"Major Amery!" For a second Maurice Tarn's pose of virtuous indignation held, and then, before the glittering eyes of the other, he wilted. "If you feel that," he mumbled rapidly, "the best thing I can do is to get out. I've served this firm faithfully for thirty-five years, and I don't think you're treating me well. What traffic? I know the Stanford Corporation—I've just remembered them. They're a perfectly straightforward firm."

The lifted lips, the hard, smiling eyes silenced him.

"You'll bluff to the last, eh? Well, so be it! Tarn, you're doing something of which I do not approve, and that is a mild way of putting it. And I'm going to stop you—I'm going to stop you, if it means killing you! Do you get that? You know what I am—you guess a whole lot more than you know! You're in my way, Tarn. I didn't expect to find this obstacle here." He pointed to the floor, and Tarn knew that he was speaking about the house of Amery. "I'm going to put the matter plainly to you," he went on. "Fortunes are to be made, and are being made, by two gangs that are running a dope industry. Maybe you saw something about it in the morning paper. Two gangs! There isn't room for two—is that clear to you?"

Tarn's face had gone ashen; he was incapable of speech.

The man by the writing table was not looking at him; his eyes were fixed on the street below. He seemed to find in the life and hurry of Wood Street something of overpowering interest.

"Not room for two—hardly room for one," he repeated. "The second gang had better shut up business and get out, while the going's good. There are many dangers. Soyoka's crowd aren't going to take competition lying down. I am telling you this as a friend."

Tarn licked his dry lips, but did not answer.

"The girl isn't in it?"

"No." The older man blundered into this partial admission. "You're—Soyoka!" he breathed. "Great Cæsar, I didn't dream—— I knew they were working from India and the East, but I never guessed." His voice sank to an indistinguishable rumble of sound.

Amery did not answer him; with a sideways jerk of his head he dismissed the man. Elsa saw him stagger through his office like one in a dream, and she wondered what was the reason for his white face and trembling hands.

Left alone, Amery walked slowly to his desk and sat down, his chin on his hands. Facing him on the wall hung a picture in an old-fashioned gilt frame—a portrait of an elderly man in a long, flowing wig; he wore a coat of homely brown, lace ruffles swelled under his ample chin, and in his hand was a half-unrolled map of the world. The first of the Amerys! The last of the race looked up into the hard, gray eyes of his ancestor, and he nodded.

"Illustrious forbear"—with mock gravity—"the crooked house of Amery salutes you!"

## CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR RALPH HALLAM

IT was the custom of Amery's, and it had been the custom from immemorial times, to allow the staff an hour and twenty-five minutes for luncheon. Nobody knew why this extra twenty-five minutes had been granted. It was a tradition of the house, and it was a very welcome one to Elsa Marlowe that day, for she had decided to take counsel of the only man in the world who could help solve her problems.

On the stroke of one o'clock she was out of the office and was hurrying toward Cheapside. Taxis there were in plenty, and within fifteen minutes she was alighting at the door of a small house on Half Moon Street. Scarcely had she paid the driver than the door was opened, and a good-looking man of thirty was halfway across the sidewalk to meet her.

"This is a miracle! Has the noble house of Amery gone bust?"

She preceded him into the house, and not until she was in the sedate little dining room did she answer.

"Everything has gone bust, Ralph. No, my dear, I couldn't eat. Go on with your lunch, and I will talk."

"I have had my lunch. Bring something for Miss Marlowe," ordered Doctor Ralph Hallam, and, when his man had gone, he asked anxiously: "What is wrong?"

She had known Ralph Hallam in the days when she was a lank schoolgirl. A friend of her "uncle's" and a frequent visitor to their house in Bayswater, they had

grown up together. He was, by his own confession, so inefficient a doctor that he had never practiced since the day he left the hospital. A keen business man, he had employed the small fortune which his mother had left him to such advantage that he could afford to dispense with the problematical income which might have come to him from his profession.

A fair-haired, clear-eyed man of something over thirty, his boyish, clean-shaven face and irrepressible good humor gave him the impression of one who had not left his teens very far behind.

"You're not ill, are you?" he asked, and when she shook her head smilingly, he sighed his relief. "Thank Heaven! I should be obliged to call in a real doctor if you were."

All the time he was speaking, he was disposing of her fur, her gloves, her hand bag, in his helpless way.

"You know that Mr. Tarn isn't really my uncle?"

"Eh?" He stared at her. "Oh, yes—your cousin or something, isn't he? Queer old devil—doesn't he bore you?"

"Ralph, he wants to marry me!" she said tragically.

He had taken a wine-glass from the sideboard and was putting it on the table when she spoke. The glass dropped from his fingers and splintered to a thousand pieces. Looking at him, she saw his face go suddenly white.

"I'm a clumsy fool." His voice was very steady. "Say that again. He wants to marry you—that—that——"

She nodded. "Exactly—that! Isn't it hideously unbelievable? Oh, Ralph, I'm worried. Something queer has come over him in this past week. He has quarreled with Mr. Amery——"

"Steady, steady, old girl. Sit down. Now tell me all about it. Quarreled with Amery—that's the Indian fellow?"

She told him as coherently as she could of the scene that had occurred that morning. Ralph Hallam whistled.

"The old villain!" he said softly. "But what is the idea? Why this sudden desire for matrimony? He never struck me as a marrying man. And to be mistress of the ménage at Elgin Crescent is not the most pleasant of prospects."

"He is going abroad," she said. "That is why he wants to marry in such a hurry. Oh, I ought not to have told you that!"

Too late she remembered her guardian's injunction. But if Ralph Hallam was surprised by the news, he did not betray himself.

"You'll not marry him, of course. That kind of December doesn't belong to your kind of May, Elsa."

It seemed to her that he was going to say something, but checked himself. For a second she had a spasm of fear that the day would bring her a second proposal, for a meaning light had kindled in his expressive eyes. She liked Ralph Hallam—but not that way. He was so good, so kind, such a good pal, and it would spoil everything if the unspoken message was delivered. To her intense relief he spoke of Amery.

"What kind of a man is the Indian?" he asked. "Wasn't he in the civil service?"

"I know very little about him," she said. "None of us do. He was in India for years. They say he isn't even English—he belongs to the American branch of the Amerys—and it was old Mr. Amery who found him his position in India. He is so strange."

Ralph Hallam smiled. "Mad, probably. Most of these Indian fellows go daft. It is the sun."

She shook her head. "No, he isn't mad. His manners are awful; he is abrupt to the point of rudeness. And yet, Ralph, there is something queerly fascinating

about him. I find myself wondering what his life must have been—what his recreations are. He seems to move in an atmosphere of mystery. I can't tell you what happens at the office—that wouldn't be fair—but his correspondence is so unusual. And he's magnetic. When he looks at me sometimes I have the feeling that I'm—out of control. That sounds alarming, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," smiled her puzzled companion. "Does he hypnotize you?"

"Ye-es," she hesitated. "Perhaps that is it. He reminds me of some beautiful sleek animal, though he isn't at all beautiful! Sometimes his eyes are so cruel that I shudder, and sometimes they are so sad that I could weep; and generally he is so hateful that I loathe him." She laughed softly at her own inconsistency. "Jessie Dame calls him 'the sinister man,' and perhaps she is right. Sometimes I feel, when I am in his presence, that he has the burden of some terrible crime on his mind. He is so suspicious, so horribly unbelieving. When he asks you a question he gives you the impression that he is prepared for you to tell a lie. You feel that he is watching you all the time. Everything about him is that way. He wears shoes with thick rubber soles, and when he moves it is with a sort of stealthiness that makes you jump. Mr. Tarn hates him."

"A singularly unpleasant person," said Ralph with a chuckle, "but impressive. Don't lose your young heart to him. As to Tarn, I think it would be a good idea if you went away for a while. You have never met my sister-in-law?"

"I didn't know that you had one," she said, and he smiled.

"You will like her," he said simply. "I'll get her to invite you over for a few days."

The servant came in with a tray at that moment, and,

until they were alone, neither spoke. She had finished her lunch and had risen to go, when the sound of a taxi stopping at the door brought his eyes to the street.

"Wait."

She followed his glance, but from the angle at which she stood she could not see the figure that was paying the cab man.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"The admirable Tarn," he said. "I don't think he'd better see you here. Go into the library; you know your way. When I show him into the dining room, you can make your escape. I'll take care that he doesn't see you."

There came the sound of the door-bell, and she hurried into the little study and presently heard Maurice Tarn's deep voice in the passage. She waited a second, then, tip-toeing along the passage, opened the door and let herself out.

Tarn, his nerves on edge, heard the thud of the closing door and looked round suspiciously.

"What was that?"

"My man going out," said Ralph coolly. "What is your trouble?"

For a while the other man did not answer; then, with a groan, he dropped into an easy-chair and covered his face with his hands.

"As bad as that, eh?" Ralph Hallam asked.

"He knows," said the muffled voice of Tarn.

"Which 'he' is this—the Indian gentleman? And what does he know?"

"Everything. Hallam, he is Soyoka!"

Hallam looked at him, open-mouthed.

"You're mad—Soyoka?"

"He's either Soyoka, or he's somewhere high up in the gang. Why shouldn't he be? The profit of Amery's isn't eight thousand a year. We know what profit there



is in Soyoka's; they're making millions, while we're making thousands. He's been living in India, not guessing that old Amery would leave him this business. We've always known that Indian officials were hand in glove with Soyoka's gang. Otherwise, how would he have known where to look in the books for the consignments we've had? The first thing he did was to put his finger on a case of fancy goods we had from Stein of Leipsic and ask for particulars. He told me to get and I'm getting. Hallam, it's death to fight Soyoka! They'll stop at nothing. I can't stand any more, Hallam. I am too old for this kind of business."

"Not too old to marry, they tell me."

Tarn looked up quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I understand that you contemplate making a get-away with a lady, who shall be nameless."

Maurice Tarn shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm scared."

"Scared you may be." There was nothing pleasant in Ralph Hallam's voice; his face had hardened, and the lower lip pouted ominously. "And if you feel like getting away, why, you can go. You've enough money to get your nerves in order. South America, of course? I thought so. Go and be blessed! You've lost your nerve, and, so far as I am concerned, you're valueless. You're worse than that—you're a danger. We'll have a quick division, and then you can go—to the devil if you like."

Slowly he crossed to the broken man and stood looking down at him.

"But you go alone. I want a partner."

"Elsa?" gasped the other.

"Elsa," said Ralph Hallam. "I can talk her into my way of thinking. That will be easy. I want her, Maurice. She is altogether adorable. I don't blame you for wanting her. She is divine! But I want her, too.

There is a whole world of happiness in that slim lady, Maurice!"

"But—but——" Tarn was looking at him, horror-stricken. Some solitary cell in his brain, where decency had once dwelt, was operating powerfully, "but you can't, Ralph! You're married—I know that you're married. You can't marry Elsa!"

"I said nothing about marriage," said Ralph Hallam testily.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MAN IN THE ROOM

IN the drive back to the office Elsa was in a quieter frame of mind and could think clearly. She had not told Hallam everything. He knew nothing, she thought, of her nightly ordeal, when, his study table littered with bottles he had emptied, Maurice Tarn had talked and talked until her head reeled. She used to think his oblique references to matrimony, its advantages and compensations, were efforts of sheer loquacity. She understood now. Muddled and bemused, he was trying to prepare her for his monstrous proposal. Something was wrong—badly wrong. He did not drink so heavily in the old days. She checked a sigh, as the cab turned into Wood Street, and she tapped at the window to stop the machine before it reached the door of Amery's.

It was half past two when she hurried up the narrow stairs, hoping that her unpleasant employer had not rung for her. As she opened the door of her room, she saw a man sitting on a chair by the window. Though it was a warm day, he wore an overcoat, over the collar of which his black hair flowed. His back was toward her, for he seemed absorbed in his contemplation of the street below, and not until he heard the click of the closing door did he turn round suddenly and stand up. For a moment Elsa stared at him, open-mouthed. It was a Chinaman!

He was dressed in the height of fashion. His smartly cut overcoat was wasp-waisted; his striped gray trousers were rigidly creased; and over his enameled boots he

wore a pair of white spats. The fashionable cravat, the neat gloves, all these things were European. But the face! The fathomless black eyes, set behind lashless lids; the yellow face like wrinkled parchment; the bloodless lips; the protruding jaw—she had never seen anything quite so hideous; and, as though he read her thoughts, he said, in perfect English:

"Handsome is as handsome does. Feng Ho, bachelor of science—my card!" And, with a little bow, he handed her an oblong of pasteboard, which she took mechanically.

At that moment she became aware of a strange and lovely sound. It was the glorious note of a bird in song. Perched on a shelf was a cage of exquisite workmanship. Gold wire and colored glass combined to make the palace of the little songster a thing of rare beauty. Standing on the perch was a lemon-yellow canary, his thick throat throbbing in the song of his kind.

"How wonderful!" she breathed. "Where did it come from?"

Feng Ho grinned. "I brought him here. 'Pi' always accompanies me. In the street many people looked round, thinking it remarkable that a Chinese gentleman, a bachelor of science, should carry a common birdcage in his hand. But Pi needs the air. It is not good for a little bird to live all the time in rooms. Pi, unworthy and ugly little crow, sing your stupid song for the beautiful lady."

The bird had been momentarily silent, but now he burst again into a flood of melody that filled the drab room with golden sound.

"He is wonderful!" said Elsa again and looked from the bird to his owner.

The inscrutable eyes of the Chinaman were watching her.

"I am afraid I gave you rather a shock," he said, in his

queer, mincing way. "You are probably not used to meeting Chinamen, Miss Marlowe."

She gasped. How did this creature know her name?

"You—you want to see Major Amery?" she said, recovering her equilibrium.

"I have seen him. He asked me to wait a little while and to introduce myself when you came. I am afraid I shall be a frequent visitor."

She forced herself to smile. "You need not be afraid of that, Mr.——"

Should she call him Mr. Feng or Mr. Ho? Again he must have read her thoughts.

"Feng-Ho is a compound name," he said, "and it is unnecessary to employ any prefix." He was looking complacently at his brand-new gloves, as he spoke, and then: "Major Amery has just come in."

She looked up at him quickly. "I didn't hear him," she said.

He nodded rapidly. "Yes, he is now walking across the room; he has stopped by the fireplace." He held his head erect in an attitude of listening. "Now he is at his desk, and he has picked up a paper. Did you not hear the rustle of it?"

She looked at him suspiciously. Was this wretched man, who had so easily assumed terms of equality, amusing himself at her expense?

"I hear everything," he said. "Now he is sitting in his chair. It creaked."

She walked to the door of the major's room and opened it. He was sitting at his desk; his hand was outstretched to touch the bell that summoned her when she looked in.

"Come in," he said brusquely. "You've met Feng Ho?"

He saw her flushed cheeks, and his lip lifted in that hateful smile of his.

"He has been giving you a demonstration of his hearing? That is his one vanity."

He looked round at the Chinaman. Feng Ho displayed the immense cavity of his mouth in a grin that stretched from ear to ear.

"Close the door, please," he said, and then, as she was about to obey, shutting the Chinaman out, a string of unintelligible words came from his lips, and she saw Feng Ho hide his hands in his sleeves and bow.

"You may see a great deal of Feng Ho. On the other hand, you may not. Take this letter."

For the next quarter of an hour her fingers were flying over the pages of her notebook, for, when Amery dictated, he spoke at a speed that tried her ability to the limit. His words came like the staccato rattle of a machine gun, and the sentence ended as abruptly. She looked up, expecting to be dismissed, and found him looking at her.

"Feng Ho is Chinese," he said unnecessarily, then added, with a look of annoyance, when he saw her smile: "So many people mistake the Chinese for a neighboring nation." He paused and then went on slowly: "Soyoka, on the other hand, is a Jap, and Soyoka is a very good paymaster."

The name seemed familiar to her, but for the moment she could not remember where she had seen or heard it.

"A very excellent paymaster," he went on. "I think you might do better if you served him instead of this amateur crowd. Soyoka pays well."

His eyes did not leave her face, and he saw that she was still puzzled.

"Do you want me to leave you—Amery's?" she asked. "Who is Soyoka? I seem to have heard the name somewhere."

"Soyoka is a Japanese gentleman," he said, a hint of primness in his tone, "and a very powerful Japanese

gentleman and a very rich Japanese gentleman. There are no"—he paused—"flies on Soyoka. And his friends are always willing to enlist the services of people who are likely to be of help. Soyoka would not object to engaging one who had been working for his competitors; in fact, he would welcome the opportunity. And, as I say, he is a very excellent paymaster."

She shook her head.

"You bewilder me, Major Amery. I really don't know who Soyoka is, and I don't think I should care to work for Eastern people."

He made no reply. Then:

"You can trust Feng Ho," he said unexpectedly. "He has all the virtues and none of the vices of the East. Most Chinamen are amiable souls, with a passion for songbirds. If Feng Ho ever walks into this office, however, you may like Feng Ho. He improves upon acquaintance. A river pirate killed his father," he went on in his inconsequent way. "Feng Ho followed him into the mountains of Ningpo and brought back seven pirates' heads in a Gladstone bag. A queer fellow."

She was speechless with horror and amazement. "That—that little man?" she said incredulously. "How dreadful!"

"It's rather dreadful to have your father's throat cut," said the strange man coldly. And then, again going off at a tangent: "Feng Ho is death to Soyoka's rivals—remember that."

"Who is Soyoka?" she asked, a little exasperated. "You've made three references to him, Major Amery, and I may be dull, but I really can't see their application."

He did not reply; that was his most maddening and most offensive trick.

"What do you do with yourself on Sundays?" he asked abruptly.

For answer she rose and gathered up her notes.

"You will want these letters before the afternoon post, Major Amery," she said.

"You haven't answered me."

"I don't think that it is a matter which really concerns you, does it?" she said with a touch of hauteur which she felt was absurd.

His fingers were beating a rapid tattoo upon his blotting pad.

"The private lives of my employees are a matter of considerable interest to me," he said. "But, perhaps, it isn't the practice in this country to be too closely concerned. Only, it struck me that your cottage was rather isolated and very near the river; and there should be bars on the window of your room. It is rather too close to the ground, and any active man could jump up to the portico and be in your room before you could say knife."

Elsa sat down suddenly. How did this man know Maurice Tarn's little week-end cottage on the upper reaches of the Thames? And yet he not only knew, but had examined the place so carefully that he had located the room in which she slept on her week-end visits; had even made calculations about the height of the window. It was unbelievable.

"I really don't understand you, Major Amery. There is something behind all these questions, and, frankly, I am not very easy in my mind about—about things."

She hated herself for this failing of hers; there was always a lame end to her sentences when she was speaking to this man. And then, to her amazement, he laughed. She had never seen him laugh before, and she gazed, fascinated. His whole aspect was changed, and for a second he was human; but, as suddenly as he had begun, he stopped, and his face was frozen again to a graven inexpressiveness.



"You must ask Feng Ho for one of his canaries; he has several. But, unless you promise to take the little bird for a walk every evening, as the Britisher takes his dog, he will not give you one. Thank you, that will do for the present."

Elsa came out of the office, her face flushed, her mind disordered, hesitating between anger and amusement. Feng Ho had gone. She wished he had left the canary behind; she needed some antidote to the sinister man.

## CHAPTER VI

### MRS. TRENE HALLAM'S CONSIDERATION

FEW people who visited Mrs. Trene Hallam's expensively furnished flat in Herbert Mansions, associated her name with that of the prosperous young doctor of Half Moon Street; and those who, by coincidence, were acquainted with both, never for one moment supposed that this pretty, golden-haired woman, with her pale blue eyes and tight, hard mouth, was in any way related to that popular and pleasant man.

For a consideration Mrs. Hallam lived apart from her husband and claimed no relationship. She bred Pekingese dogs, was a member of two bridge clubs, and apparently was a lady of independent means. It was not likely that people would think of Doctor Hallam in her connection, for she was a daughter of the people, whose lack of education and refinement was sometimes only too painfully apparent.

She had married Hallam with the object of getting away from the tiny villa where he had lodged with her mother during the days when he was a student at St. Thomas'. The marriage had not been a happy one. Louise Hallam, to other failings, added a somewhat erratic conception of common honesty. She was a born pilferer, and not even her changed circumstances eradicated the habit! Twice Ralph Hallam had to pay heavily to avoid a scandal. Once this kleptomaniac had narrowly escaped arrest. Thereafter they had lived apart, and, for the "consideration" she now enjoyed, she was quite willing to remain in her present state for the rest of her life.

He was the rarest of visitors at Herbert Mansions, and the surprise she displayed when he was shown into the drawing-room, where she was taking her rest, with a cup of coffee by her side and a cigarette between her lips, was not wholly assumed.

"Welcome, stranger!" she said genially. "This is a sight for sore eyes. What's up?"

His expression was one of pain. "I wish you'd get out of that gutter habit," he said wearily.

She was eying him keenly and unresentfully. The taunt of her humble origin had not aroused her anger in years.

"What do you want?" she asked bluntly. "A divorce?"

He took out a cigarette and lit it before he answered.

"No, thank goodness, I've recovered from that folly! When I think of the fools I should have married if I'd divorced you when I wanted, I am grateful to you. You're my safety, Lou. Never divorce me!"

"You needn't fret," she said complacently, "I shan't. If I wanted to marry again it would be different, but I don't. One marriage is enough for little me! Ralph, what are you doing nowadays?"

"What do you mean—what am I doing?" he demanded.

"You're making money. I'm not complaining about that; but you're making big money, and I'm wondering how? You've increased my allowance, bless you! And when I asked you to buy me that little place in the country, you bought it without a kick. You're not doing that out of mamma's money. What is the dope?"

He started and looked at her suspiciously. "I'd like to know what you mean by that?" he asked.

She struggled to a sitting position, laughing.

"You're getting touchy, Ralph! What I meant was, how are you getting it? I can't imagine you committing

a burglary, though I've always known there was nothing crooked you wouldn't do. It must be a safe swindle, because you don't look a day older than when I married you. Worry ages."

"Never you mind how I get my money," he said shortly. "I want you to do something to earn yours. I've made life pretty agreeable to you, haven't I, Lou?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and the tight mouth became a straight red line.

"I mistrust you when you start in to tell me all the things you've done for me," she said truthfully. "At the same time, I'll admit that you've never stinted me of money. What is the hook to this bit of bait?"

"You're a suspicious woman!" he said. "All I want from you is information. A few years ago you wanted to see the world, and I sent you to India."

She nodded, watching him. "Well?"

"You had a chance of meeting the very best people in India, and apparently you did. You came back with more jewelry than you took out—a diamond sunburst was one thing." She did not meet his eyes. "A rajah gave it to you—you were there a year. Did you ever meet a Major Paul Amery?"

She knit her brows.

"Amery? Why, yes, I think I met him. One of those reserved people who never speak, and you get an idea they're thinking a whole lot, until you know them better, and then you discover that they're worrying about their overdraft. Paul Amery? Why, of course! He was rather nice to me, now I come to think of it. Attached to the political service, isn't he?"

"That I don't know," said Ralph; "but if he was rather nice to you, and you're friendly with him, I'd like you to improve his acquaintance."

"Is he in London?"

He nodded.

"What do you want? Are you stringing him?"

"I'm not stringing him," said the other with elaborate patience, "if by stringing you mean——" He paused for a smile.

"Kidding," suggested his wife, lighting one cigarette from the glowing end of another. "I'm out of practice with that work, though I'll do anything to oblige a loving husband. Which reminds me, Ralph, that my car has reached the museum stage. That Boyson woman has got a cute little car, one of the new kind——"

"We'll talk about that later," said her husband, with a touch of irritability. "The point is, will you go along and see this fellow? I have an idea he's engaged in a——er——an unpleasant business. At any rate, I want you to get acquainted with him. That's one thing."

"And the other?" Mrs. Hallam's eyes narrowed. "In my experience of you, Ralphie, it's the other thing that's most important. You always make a fuss about the least important job and pass the other over carelessly. What is it?"

Ralph rose with a laugh.

"It is nothing, really. Only Tarn's niece is having a little trouble with him. Tarn is the man I've told you about. The old fool wants to marry her, and I think it would be rather doing the girl a service to get her away for a day or two. I want you to invite her to come and stay with you, and you can be my sister-in-law for the occasion."

"Pretty?"

He nodded.

"I'll bet she is. And she thinks you are the wonderful boy—handsome Alec! And when she comes here, what happens? Do I go out when you visit? Or am I called away into the country?"

There was an ugly look on his face. "You get a little too fresh sometimes, Lou. I don't keep you to amuse me. There are four good theaters in town that I can go to when I want to laugh."

She waved him down. "Don't lose your temper! Tempers worry little sister! Write down her name and address. Have you spoken about me?"

He nodded.

"Yours to command," she said lazily. "Now, what's the consideration, Ralph?"

"You can have your new car," he growled. "But I'm serious about Amery; it is necessary that you should see him. You can't miss the place; it's in Wood Street, the Amery building. And you'll see the girl, she's working in the office—her name is Elsa Marlowe. You can't very well mistake her, either, for she's a peach! And be careful with Amery; he's sharp!"

She smiled contemptuously.

"I've got a new gown from Poiret's that would take the edge off a razor," she said. "When do you want me to go?"

"To-day. You can speak to the girl; tell her you're my sister-in-law."

"And a widow. My departed husband will have to have been dead for a year or so, for that gown of mine is slightly on the joyous side."

She made no further reference to the girl, her future, or her fate. That was not the kind of "consideration" that ever troubled Mrs. Trene Hallam.

## CHAPTER VII

### AN INDIAN ACQUAINTANCE

THERE was a tap at the door, and, without moving her eyes from the notebook from which she was typing, Elsa said:

"Come in."

The faintest whiff of an exotic scent made her look round in surprise. The lady who stood in the doorway was a stranger to her. Elsa thought she was pretty in her thin and dainty way. The dress, she saw with an appraising woman's eye, was lovely.

"Is this Major Amery's office?"

The voice was not so pleasing; there was just the faintest hint of commonness. But she had no time to form an impression before, with a sweet smile, the woman came toward her, her gloved hand extended.

"Isn't this Elsa Marlowe?" she asked.

"That is my name," said Elsa, wondering who this unknown might be.

"I am Louise Hallam—Mrs. Trene Hallam. Ralph told me about you."

A light dawned upon Elsa.

"Oh, yes, of course—you're Ralph's sister-in-law?"

"Yes, I married his dear brother—such a sweet man," murmured Mrs. Hallam. "But much too good for this world!" She sighed and touched her eyes daintily with a little handkerchief, providentially at hand. "The good die young," she said. "He was thirty. A few years younger than Ralph, but, oh, such a sweet man! What a dear little office!" She beamed round approvingly to survey the uninspiring scene. "And how do you get on

with Major Amery? I always thought he was such a perfectly lovely man when I met him in India. My dear husband took me there for a holiday."

She sighed again, but this time perhaps with a little more sincerity, for India held memories which were at once dear and dour.

"You know Major Amery?" said the girl eagerly. "What sort of a man is he—to meet, I mean?" she grew hot, as she realized that her eagerness might be misunderstood.

"A sweet creature," said Mrs. Hallam, and the description was so incongruous that Elsa could have laughed.

"I've called to see him, and I was killing two birds with one stone," Mrs. Hallam went on, and, with a roguish little smile and uplifted finger, she said: "I know a little girl who is coming to stay with me for a whole week!"

Elsa flushed and, for some reason which she could not fathom, hesitated.

"I don't know whether it will be possible, Mrs. Hallam," she began.

"It must be possible. I'm going to give you a really nice time. It was very stupid of Ralph not to tell me that he had such a charming friend. I would have asked you over before. We'll do some theaters and concerts together, though concerts certainly bore me stiff—I mean, they bore me," she corrected herself hastily. "I will not take no for an answer. When can you come?"

Elsa thought rapidly.

"To-morrow?" Mrs. Hallam suggested.

She could not understand her own reluctance to accept an invitation which sounded so enticing.

"To-morrow I shall expect you."

Mrs. Hallam took a card from her case and laid it on the table.

"You shall have the dearest little room of your own.



I'm all alone, and you won't be bothered with servants; it is a service flat. If you want anything, you just ring for it. I think you'll be very happy."

"I'm not so sure that my uncle can spare me," said Elsa, more loath to go than ever, now that she had practically accepted.

"Your uncle *must* spare you. And now I must see dear Major Amery. Would you tell him I am here?"

Elsa tapped at the door, and her employer's sharp voice answered her.

"Mrs. Trene Hallam to see you, Major Amery," said Elsa.

He stared up from his writing.

"Mrs. Trene Hallam to see me? Now isn't that nice of her? Shoot her in!"

Elsa opened the door for the woman and closed it behind her, as Major Amery rose slowly to greet the visitor who sailed across the room.

"You don't remember me, Major Amery?" she said, with a hint of coquetry in her pale blue eyes; a smile at once pleased and reproachful.

"Indeed, I remember you very well, Mrs. Hallam. Won't you sit down?"

"It was in Poona, I think," said Mrs. Hallam when she had settled herself. "Do you remember that delightful ball the governor gave—those glorious roses everywhere? Don't you remember what a terribly hot night it was, and how they had great blocks of ice on the stair ways?"

"Are you sending back Lady Mortel's diamond brooch?"

At the sound of that metallic voice the smile left the woman's face, and she sat up.

"I—I don't know what you mean," she faltered. "I—I really don't understand you."

"While you were the guest of Lady Mortel, a diamond sunburst was missed. A servant was arrested and tried for the theft; he went to prison for three years. The other night I saw you at the theater—I saw the brooch, too."

She went red and white.

"I really do not understand you, captain——"

"Major," he said laconically. "I have been promoted since. Hallam sent you here, of course?"

"Hallam? My husband is dead."

"That's news to me," he broke in. "He was alive when he left your flat at Herbert Mansions this afternoon. Street accident?"

"I think you're very horrid," she whimpered. She was no longer the urbane woman of the world. Under his merciless glance she seemed to cringe and shrink. It was as though the meanness of her had worn through the veneer which modiste and milliner had overlaid upon the hard and ugly substance of her soul.

"I thought you were a friend of mine. I would never have called on you if I'd known you could be so horrid."

"I'm not being horrid; I'm being truthful, though I admit that truth is pretty beastly," he said. "Why did you come here?"

"To call on you," she said. "Just to renew—to meet you again. I didn't expect——"

Again he checked her.

"Tell Hallam from me to find a new occupation. Tell him I am after his blood, and I mean it! I want that amateur dope-running corporation out of my way."

"Dope running?" she gasped.

He nodded. "You didn't know? I wondered if he had told you. My last word to him is—git! You'll remember that?"

He had not resumed his seat, and now, leaning across the table, he jerked out his hand.

"Good-by, Mrs. Trene Hallam. Trene is your maiden name, if I remember rightly? Your mother lived in Tenison Street, Lambeth. Don't forget the message I have given you for your husband—git!"

It needed all her artistry to compose her face into a smile, as she passed into the outer office, pulling the door behind her.

"Such a dear, sweet man, but a little changed," she murmured and took the girl's hand in hers for a second. "You will remember, my dear?"

"I will try to come, but if I can't——"

"You must come," said Louise Hallam, and there was a sharp quality in her voice. "I will not take no."

She seemed in a hurry to leave, did not linger for another second; and all the way home she was wondering whether Major Amery and his secretary were on sufficiently good terms for him to take her into his confidence.

She had hardly left the room before Amery turned quickly and opened a door that led to a tiny room, which served as a clothespress and wash place. Its solitary occupant, who was sitting on an old trunk, rose, as the door opened, and came out into the office. The major held Mrs. Hallam's card between his two fingers.

"Go to this address some time to-night. Search the flat thoroughly. I want every document that you can find."

He spoke in the sibilant dialect of Canton, and Feng Ho was sufficiently Europeanized to nod.

"You must use no force, unless it is absolutely necessary. You may find nothing. On the other hand, you may get some valuable information. If necessary, you may be able to use the name of Soyoka to advantage. Go!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EXPLOIT OF FENG HO

ELGIN CRESCENT was singularly unattractive to Elsa that night. She came by bus from the City to Trafalgar Square and walked the remainder of the way through the three parks. The crocuses were blooming; the trees were shooting out emerald-green buds; the early bushes were in full leaf; here and there she saw the beginning of rhododendron flowers, hard little sticky masses of an indescribable color that would presently set the park aflame. But, wherever her eyes roamed, her mind was completely absorbed, even to the exclusion of Maurice Tarn and his amazing proposal, in the strange man who had suddenly come into her workaday life. She did not even resent the companionship of the voluble Miss Dame, who had insisted upon coming home with her. Miss Dame lived at Notting Hill Gate, and her company could hardly be refused.

The speech might have been all on one side but for the fact that Jessie Dame chose, for her discourse, the subject of Elsa's thoughts.

"What I hate about him," said Miss Dame, with typical energy, "is his slinkiness. Have you ever noticed, Miss Marlowe, how he slinks around, wearing sneakers, too?"

"Sneakers? Oh, you mean his rubber shoes?"

"Sneakers is the word for them, and a very good word," said Miss Dame.

And yet, thought Elsa, the sinister man did not "slink." He was furtive, but not meanly furtive. You could not imagine a mean leopard or a mean lion stalking his prey.

The thought startled her. Was that the reason for his queer secretiveness? Was he stalking somebody? She dismissed the possibility with a smile.

"I'm getting romantic," she said.

"You *are* romantic," said Miss Dame decisively. "I've always said that you're wasted in an office; you ought to be in the pictures. You're svelte—that's the word—svelte. You'd be perfectly marvelous on the screen. I thought of going in for it myself, but only as a comic," she said with a sigh. "I'm not svelte enough."

Out of the corner of her eye Elsa caught a glimpse of the ungainly figure and agreed.

Mr. Tarn had not returned when she got to the *maisonette*. They kept no servants; two daily helps came in, in the morning and in the evening, and from one of these she learned that he had telephoned to say that he would not be home until late, and that she was not to wait dinner for him. For this she was grateful, for she was not inclined to resume the conversation of the morning.

No. 409 Elgin Crescent consisted of two *maisonettes*, a lower, comprising the ground floor and basement, and an upper, which her guardian occupied, comprising the remainder of the house. The study and dining room were on the first floor; she had the back room on the second floor, above the dining room, for a bed-sitting room; and to this safe harbor she retreated, just as soon as she had finished her dinner.

It was a pleasant little apartment, with a writing table, a dozen well-filled book-shelves, a cozy chair that she could draw up before the gas fire, and a tiny wireless set, which had filled so many long and dreary winter evenings with amusement.

She tried to read, but between her eyes and the printed page came the face of the sinister man, and the lifted lips sneered up at her so vividly and so insistently that

presently she closed the book with a crash. She wondered what this man did in the evenings. He had a club, perhaps. She remembered that Ralph had told her he had seen him there. Perhaps he went to theaters. What sort of plays would arouse him from his ingrained cynicism? Had he any relatives or friends? In a way she felt a little sorry for him, just as the sight of a prison would arouse sorrow for its undeserving occupants.

She fitted the headpieces and heard part of "Aida" relayed from the Opera House, and she found herself speculating as to whether he would be in the audience. At this evidence of imbecility she viciously tugged off the headpieces and prepared for bed. She was undressing when she heard the blundering steps of Mr. Tarn on the stairs and the bang of his study door as he closed it. At any rate he could not bother her that night. She said her prayers, turned out the light, and jumped into bed, and in a few minutes she fell into the sweet, sound sleep which is youth's greatest, but least appreciated, blessing.

She was not a heavy sleeper, but, if she had been, the sound would have awakened her. The room was in complete darkness. She could hear the ticking of the clock on the mantel, and, for the rest, silence reigned in the house.

What was it? She sat up, trying to recall the noise that had awakened her. It came again, but this time it could not have been so loud—a faint, snapping sound, which came from the window.

Slipping out of bed, she pulled aside the curtains. The fading moon still bathed the world in its eerie radiance and reflected evilly from a glittering something that lay on the window sill.

She threw up the window and, with a cry of astonishment, took the thing in her hand. It was a dagger, and the handle was inscribed in Chinese characters!

## CHAPTER IX

### "MAYFAIR 10016"

A KNIFE! Who left it there? She had to remove the wedge which kept the upper sash of her window in place, before she could lift the lower and look out. For a second she saw nothing, and then she understood.

A builder's long ladder had been reared against the wall, and the explanation of the midnight visit was now clear. The top of the ladder reached within two feet of her window, and, as she looked, she saw a dark figure slide down to the ground, pause for a moment, and look up before it vanished in the shadow of the big tree. In that space of time she saw the face distinctly—it was Feng Ho!

What should she do?

"I ought to scream, I suppose," she said to herself, but she had never felt less like screaming, although she had had a bad scare.

She turned on the light and looked at the clock. It was half past three. Mr. Tarn would be in bed, and he was the last person she wanted to arouse. Pulling on her dressing gown and slippers, she went out of the room and down the dark stairs to the dining room, the windows of which were shuttered and barred. Here she made herself tea with an electric kettle and sat down to consider what she should do next.

Feng Ho! She frowned at the thought. "You will see a great deal of Feng Ho," Amery had said, and her lips twisted in a smile. At any rate, she did not wish to see a great deal of Feng Ho in circumstances similar to

those in which he had made his appearance that morning.

And then came to her a wild and fantastic idea. It was the sight of the telephone on the sideboard that gave it to her. Major Amery occupied his uncle's house in Brook Street.

She put the thought from her, only to turn to it again. Presently she went in search of the telephone directory and found it in her uncle's study. The place reeked with the smell of brandy, and for a moment she felt physically sick and hurried out with the thick volume under her arm.

Yes, there it was—"Amery, Major P., 97b Brook Street. Mayfair 10016." He would be in bed and asleep. The prospect of rousing him filled her with malicious joy, and she lifted the hook and waited. It was a long time before the operator answered, but within a few seconds of his answering her signal, she heard a click and a sharp voice demanded:

"Who is that?"

Elsa's lips twitched. "Is that Major Amery?" she asked sweetly.

"Yes. What do you want, Miss Marlowe?"

He had recognized her voice! The discovery took her breath away, and for a moment she was unable to proceed.

"I—we've just had a visit from a friend of yours," she said, a little wildly. "At least, he didn't come in!"

"A friend of mine? You mean Feng Ho?"

His coolness was staggering.

"Of course I mean Feng Ho. He was trying to get in through the window of my room," she said, her anger rising.

"Your room?" came the quick response. "You mean your bedroom?"

"That is the only room I have," she said, and there was a silence at the other end of the phone.



After a while he spoke. "You must have been mistaken. It could not have been Feng Ho," said his voice. "He is with me now. One Chinaman looks very much like another to the uninitiated eye. I'm sorry you have been frightened."

The last word came in a different tone. He had explained her error hurriedly, which was not like him. She knew it was useless to argue the matter on the telephone.

"I'm sorry I got you out of bed," she said.

"Are you scared?"

Was she mistaken in imagining an undercurrent of anxiety and concern in his voice?

"No, I was startled."

Another silence.

"Does Mr. Tarn know?"

"No, he is asleep; I haven't wakened him, unless I'm waking him now. I'm sorry I bothered you. Good night."

"Wait," he said sharply. "You are sure you're not frightened?"

"Of course I'm not frightened, Major Amery. You're for ever thinking that I'm frightened," she said, with a smile, remembering the conversation of the morning.

Was it a quiet laugh she heard? Apparently not, for there was no laughter in his voice when he said, with his customary brusqueness:

"Good night. Go back to bed."

How like him to finish that strange conversation with a peremptory order, she thought, as she hung up the telephone. At that moment Maurice Tarn, with an old dressing gown huddled about him, came blinking into the light.

"What's wrong?" he asked harshly. "What are you doing here, telephoning at this hour of the morning? Whom were you talking to?"

"I was talking to Major Amery."

"Amery!" he squeaked. "Major Amery? What were you telling him?"

He was terrified, and in his agitation gripped her wrist with such force that she cried out.

"I'm sorry," he muttered. "What is it all about, Elsa?"

"I was merely telling Major Amery that I caught a friend of his to-night trying to get in through my window."

For a moment he could not grasp her meaning.

"Who was it?"

"I don't know—a Chinaman."

"A Chinaman!" he screamed. "A friend of Amery's, trying to get in!"

In as few words as possible she told him all she had seen, and he listened, his teeth chattering.

"Oh, my Lord!" he said, his hand on his brow. "A Chinaman! Had a knife, had he? You're sure about the knife?"

"He may have only been using it to open the window," said the girl, astounded at the extraordinary effect which the news had upon her relative. She had never seen a man in such an abject condition of fear. By the time she had finished, his pallid face was streaming with perspiration.

"You phoned Amery?" huskily. "What did he say?"

"That it wasn't Feng Ho."

"He's a liar! It was the Chinaman who came into the office to-day. I just saw him—Feng Ho! Elsa, that's my finish! They'll be watching for me now—every port."

"What is the matter, Mr. Tarn?" she asked, frightened in spite of herself by the terror of the man. "Have you done something——"

"Don't talk, don't talk." He waved her to silence. "I don't want to discuss it, I tell you. I was expecting this." He dived his hand into the pocket of his tattered dressing gown and drew out a long-barreled revolver. "But they'll not get me, Elsa!"

The hand that held the pistol shook so violently that she was in some fear that it would explode by accident, and she was relieved when he put it back in his pocket.

"Paul Amery, curse him! I could tell you something about Amery—not now, not now! I'm going into my study."

He rushed out, and she heard the key turn in the lock, and then, through the thin partition which separated the dining room from the study, there came the clink of glass. Mr. Tarn was fortifying himself against the terrors which the remaining hours of darkness might hold.

## CHAPTER X

### MR. TARN MAKES A WILL

MR. TARN was not at breakfast the next morning; she would have been surprised if he had been. His door was still locked, and only after repeated hammerings did his sleepy voice growl an intimation that he would be out in a few minutes. Elsa hurried her breakfast and was successful in leaving the house before Tarn made an appearance.

She was anxious to get to the office and curious as to what explanation Amery would offer. She might have guessed that he would offer none. When, at half past nine, his bell summoned her, she went to meet a man who certainly bore no appearance of having spent the night out of bed. He met her with his characteristic lack of greeting and plunged straightway into his letters, firing across the table magazine after magazine of words, to be caught and recorded. It was not until she was leaving that he made any reference to their conversation of the early morning.

"Didn't you call me up in the night? I have a dim recollection of the circumstances."

"I had almost forgotten," she said coolly, and his face twitched.

"Possibly you were dreaming," he said. "But it is a dream which will never come true—again. When Feng Ho comes, ask him to tell you the story of his finger."

"His finger?" she repeated, surprised in spite of herself.

"His little finger. You broke yours at school, playing hockey. Ask him how he lost his."

"I didn't know he'd lost a finger."

"Ask him," he said, and his head jerked to the door.

She wished he would find another way of telling her that she could go.

It was nearly lunch time when Feng Ho came, as dapper as ever, his coat spotless, his trousers even more rigidly creased, his white spats exchanged for articles of bright yellow leather; his umbrella and his hat were in one hand, and in the other the gilded cage, with a dignified canary balancing itself on the central perch.

He greeted the girl with a grin.

"My unworthy little bird has been sick all night. I have been sitting by his side, feeding him with sugar—from midnight till six o'clock this morning. And now he is better and will sing for us. Pi"—he addressed the yellow songster—"open your hideous little beak and emit unmusical noises for this honorable lady."

"Feng, you are not telling the truth," said Elsa severely. "You weren't sitting up all night with your bird."

The little man looked at her, blandly innocent. Then he turned his melancholy eyes to the bird.

"Little Pi, if I am lying, do not sing; but if I am speaking the truth, then let your ugly little throat produce contemptible melody."

And, as though he understood, the loyal little bird burst into a torrent of sunny song. Mr. Feng Ho smiled delightedly.

"It is a peculiar and noteworthy fact," he said, with his best European manner, "that has been observed by every seeker after truth, from Confucius to Darwin, that the animal world—by which I refer to the world of vertebrate mammals—are the living embodiment of truth and the chief exponents of veracity. I will now, with

your gracious permission, sit down and watch your vivacious fingers manipulate the keyboard of your honorable typewriter—to employ the idiom of our neighbors, but not friends, the Nipponese.”

He sat patiently, practically without a movement, except to turn his eyes from time to time to the bird, and there seemed some strange understanding between these two, for no sooner did Feng Ho’s slit of a mouth open in a smile than the bird seemed to rock with musical laughter.

Miss Dame came in, while Elsa was typing, dropped her jaw at the first view of the Chinaman, but graciously admitted that the canary was the best song bird she had ever heard.

“It must be a gentleman bird,” she said. “Gentleman birds always sing better than lady birds. And why shouldn’t they? They’ve got less responsibility, if you understand me.”

She glanced coldly at the Chinaman, as he nodded his agreement.

“If you’ve got to lay eggs, you can’t find time for keeping up your singing. Excuse me, do you know Sessuewaka?” This to Feng Ho, who expressed his grief that he had never heard of the gentleman.

“He’s the model of you,” said Miss Dame, glaring at him. “Slightly better looking, if you’ll excuse my rudeness, but that’s probably the paint and powder he puts on his face. You’ve never seen him in ‘The Bride of Fuji Yama’—that’s a mountain?”

The explanation was necessary because Miss Dame pronounced it “fujjy yammer.”

“You’ve missed a treat,” she said regretfully when he shook his head. “He was simply marvelous, especially when he committed—what’s the word?—haki raki?”

Elsa refused to assist her and paused in her work with

such point that Miss Dame was conscious of the interruption she had produced, and retired.

"A very pretty young lady," said Feng Ho, and Elsa, who thought he was being sarcastic, was prepared to snub him, but his next words demonstrated his sincerity. "The Eastern view differs considerably from the Western view. I can tell you that, speaking with authority, as a bachelor of science."

She wondered what special authority this particular bachelorhood conferred when it came to a question of judging looks, but wisely she did not pursue the topic.

When she got to the office she had found a note from Mrs. Trene Hallam. It would have been a letter from anybody else, for it occupied two sheets of notepaper; but Mrs. Hallam's calligraphy was not her strong point. The lettering was enormous, and ten words a page was a generous average.

You will come to-night at seven. I will have dinner ready for you, and I will drive you every morning to your office.

There was a postscript.

Please don't tell Major Amery that you are staying with me. He may think I have some reason.

The postscript annoyed her, though why she did not know. Perhaps it was the assumption that she would tell Major Amery anything about her private affairs.

She only saw her uncle for a few minutes. Coming in from luncheon, she had to pass his door, which was open, and she saw him sitting at his table and would have gone on if he had not called her back.

"Shut the door," he growled. "I've been to see my lawyer on a certain matter, and I've made my will."

This was rather surprising news. She had never thought of her uncle as a man of means, or having property to dispose of, and she could only utter a commonplace about the wisdom of taking such a precaution.

"He's a shrewd fellow is Nigitts," he said, "very shrewd. And remarkably well up in the matter of"—he cleared his throat—"criminal law. The most one can get in this country for a certain offense is two years, and Nigitts says one would probably get away with less, if a statement was made voluntarily."

She wondered what on earth he was talking about. Had he been drinking? His face was flushed, his eyes heavy with want of sleep, but from her own experience she thought he was sober.

"I've had to give the matter a whole lot of thought—there are other people besides me involved in this business," he said; "but I thought you'd like to know that I'd improved the shining hour"—his attempt to be jovial was pathetic—"and I've left you a little bit of money, although I don't suppose you will touch it for years. Would you like to be rich, Elsa?"

He looked at her from between his narrowed lids.

"I suppose everybody would like to be rich," smiled the girl.

"You'd like to be good and happy, eh? Like the girl in the storybook?" he sneered. And then: "What has Amery been doing all the morning?"

"Working," she said.

"Nothing unusual?"

She shook her head.

"I'd like to take a look at some of his letters, Elsa. Anyway, I'm in the business, and Major Amery has no secrets from me. Where do you keep the copy file?"

"Major Amery keeps his own copies in the safe," she said.



He played with a blotter.

"I don't see why you shouldn't slip in a second carbon?" he suggested.

There was no profit in discussing the matter with him.

"I can't do that—you know very well I can't. It would be dishonest and mean, and I'd rather leave Amery's than do it."

"You like him, eh?"

"I loathe him," she said frankly, and his face brightened.

"That's the kind of talk I like to hear, little girl. He's a swine, that fellow! There's nothing anybody could do to a man like that could be called mean."

"I am the 'anybody' concerned, and there are some things I will not do," she said and walked out.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SYNDICATE

THERE were times when Ralph Hallam's mind went back to the days of romance, and conspirators, cloaked and masked, met in underground cellars to plan their dark deeds. Certainly there was the advantage of safety in that picturesque method, and Ralph played safe all the time. Such meetings gave to the leaders an anonymity which must have been very comforting.

This thought occurred to him, as he went slowly up the stairs that led to No. 3, the largest of the private dining rooms that the Café Fornos had to offer to its clients. For luncheon these rooms are very seldom taken, but once a month Doctor Hallam gave a little party, where business men could meet, discuss politics, theaters, the contemporary events of sport, and, when the coffee and liquors were served, and cigar cases came to light, and when, moreover, the waiters had withdrawn, the peculiar business which brought them together.

As Ralph stood in the doorway, smiling and nodding to the waiting guests, he decided that he had never seen an assembly that looked less like a meeting of conspirators. They were stoutish business men, lovers of good living, middle-aged, slightly or completely bald; men in the sober habiliments of their class. Jarvie of Birmingham greeted him warmly and looked past him, seemingly expecting a companion.

"The old man couldn't get away," said Hallam easily. "He's not particularly well."

He shook hands with the half dozen guests and took

his seat. No. 3 had an outer and an inner door, and when at last the waiter had placed his cigar boxes and liquor bottles on the buffet and had withdrawn, Hallam walked to the doors, turned the key on both, and came back to his chair.

Instantly the company relaxed, and the atmosphere changed. It was as though, for the past hour, everybody had been playing a part, and all that had been said and done was an act from a dull comedy.

Without preamble Hallam spoke.

"There are three new consignments, the largest in London, the second largest at Hull——"

"Bonded or through the customs?" somebody asked.

"Out of bond, of course," replied Hallam. "Jarvie, you will arrange the distribution. It is consigned to Stanford's Birmingham address. The second came into Avonmouth yesterday and goes forward to Philadelphia."

"What about this Greek they caught at Cleveland?" asked Jarvie, and it was clear that this question was on the lips of the whole company, for there followed a babble of questions.

"You need not worry about him, and the story of the American police tracing a doctor and a City merchant is all bunk. Some imaginative American reporter invented that. No, that isn't our trouble. Bickerson——"

"Hasn't anybody tried to straighten Bickerson?" asked a voice. "A couple of thousand would put him quiet."

Ralph shook his head.

"I know Bickerson; he's not that kind. And if you straightened him, he'd slack down, and the higher-up people would put another man into the case, and he'd have to be straightened," said Hallam. "The only man you need worry about is Tarn, who is getting cold feet. And Soyoka," he added.

There was a glum silence at this. Soyoka was the

specter that walked at every man's elbow, the terror of the unknown. They were business men, each with his little bolt hole, his alibi, his ready explanation if the police by accident hit upon his story, and behind each was a reputation for commercial integrity that could not be gainsaid. Moral considerations did not concern them. That they were marketing a vile poison that wrecked men and women and drove them to insanity, hardly counted. They were marketing a commodity which paid enormous profits, and for which there was an increasing demand.

"Soyoka?"

Jarvie took his cigar from his mouth, looked at it thoughtfully, and put it back. He was a heavy-browed man, with a fringe of hair above his collar and a shining head.

"There's room for Soyoka," he said.

"So I think," nodded Hallam, "but he doesn't share the view that there is room for two. Now I'm going to tell you fellows something. Old Tarn is certain that his boss is either Soyoka or Soyoka's leading agent!"

"His boss? Who is he?" asked Jarvie, scowling at his chief.

"Major Amery."

Ralph saw the eyes of the beetle-browed man open wide.

"Amery?" he said incredulously. "Not Paul Amery?"

"Why, do you know him?" demanded the other.

Mr. Jarvie was whistling softly.

"Paul Amery! I wonder if it's the same? It's not Paul Amery of the Indian political service, by any chance? The man who got into trouble at Shanghai?"

In his excitement Ralph pushed back his chair from the table.

"Let us hear this," he said. "You've got the man right enough. Do you know him?"

Jarvie shook his head.

"No, I don't know him, but one of my managers knew him very well. We have a branch house in Shanghai; we export Brummagem goods and that kind of truck; and my manager, who came back a year ago on sick leave, was full of him. He is not by any chance connected with Tarn's firm, is he?"

"He is Amery & Amery," said Ralph. "His uncle left him the business some time back."

Again Mr. Jarvie whistled.

"I only know what my man told me. It appears that Amery was lent by the Indian government to the board of control, or whatever they call it, in Shanghai. In Shanghai, as you probably know, there are three or four millionaire families that have made their money out of opium smuggling and running guns to the rebels. He was sent up to keep an eye upon the arms gang, but got into the opium commission and had to leave suddenly. I don't know the right of it, but my man says he was caught in the act of passing out opium. There was a tremendous scandal and a veiled reference to the case in the Shanghai press, but, of course, no reference to Amery, because these Europeans in Shanghai are pretty clannish. All that was known was that his name was taken off the roll of members of the French Club, and he disappeared by the first mail boat. It was the gossip of the place that he was working with Soyoka, who has a pretty vivid reputation in the China Sea. There was also talk of his having knifed a Chinese policeman who was going to give him away. They say he's better than the best knife thrower that ever starred in a circus. Learned it up in Nepal, and he never carries any other weapon. It works silently, and in his hands very effectively. What makes Tarn think he's Soyoka?"

"Something he said to him," replied Ralph, "some threat of his. If he is Soyoka's man——"

"If he is Soyoka's man," interrupted Mr. Jarvie, "he's more dangerous than a bagful of rattlesnakes." He looked meditatively at Ralph. "Isn't there a way you could fix a fellow like that?" he asked.

"How do you mean—fix?" demanded Ralph bluntly, conscious that the curious eyes of the party were on him.

"I don't mean anything illegal," said Mr. Jarvie virtuously, and he again examined his inspiring cigar. "But I think, if a fellow like that had a bit of a shock—well, he'd go carefully and probably save us a few uncomfortable minutes."

This was evidently generally agreed. Somebody at the far end of the table murmured:

"Not illegal, of course," though his tone hardly convinced.

"There is only one way to stop Soyoka, if he is Soyoka," said Ralph coldly, "and that is to put him beyond the power of troubling us. Does anybody mean that?"

Nobody apparently did mean that, for the company murmured a soothing denial.

"No, what I mean," said Jarvie, who hesitated so long that apparently he was not quite sure of what he did mean, "is that, if he can't be straightened, he ought to be frightened."

He puffed at his cigar and looked up at the ceiling.

"I don't know much about London; I'm a provincial man myself; but I'm told that there are places in this town where you could hire a man to beat up your own grandmother for a ten-pound note. Personally I do not approve of violence; it is foreign to my nature. But there must be people who—ah, could scare—that is the word, scare—Amery."

It was four o'clock when the luncheon party broke up, and Ralph went down-stairs alone. In the vestibule he saw a very plump, pleasant-looking gentleman being

helped on with his greatcoat. At first he could not believe the evidence of his eyes, and then, glancing through the doorway, he saw a very sedate Rolls draw slowly up to the curb and a footman alight and open the door.

"Why, Tupperwill," he said, "you're in a strange part of London!"

Mr. Tupperwill, proprietor of Stebbing's Banking Corporation, looked round leisurely. Every movement of his was deliberate, and his round blue eyes lit up in a stare of recognition.

"My dear doctor," he murmured, "extraordinary—most extraordinary! A queer place for Stebbing's indeed—a very queer place!"

In the City of London, Stebbing's Bank was respected without being considered. A survival of one of those private banking corporations that had come into existence in the early part of the eighteenth century, its business was comparatively small, and its clientele extremely select. Stebbing's had resisted the encroachments of the great joint stock companies and maintained its independence largely on the tradition established by its founder, who in the early days of the firm had gone to prison for contempt of court rather than produce books which would have incriminated one of his clients. For generations men with great names kept private accounts at Stebbing's—accounts which their confidential secretaries never scanned; for even the owners of great names have affairs and business of a peculiarly private kind, and Stebbing's flourished by its very secrecy.

Mr. Tupperwill, its present proprietor, was wont to boast that he had not an employee under the age of fifty, though he himself was on the breezy side of thirty-five, a stout, youthful-looking man, with a large face, many chins, and hands of exceeding plumpness.

"Heavy luncheons are anathema to me." He put his

hand in his pocket, pulled out a little pile of silver, and, selecting sixpence, handed it to the unsatisfied cloakroom attendant with a benevolent smile. "*Anathema maranatha!* But some of my clients are rather sybaritic. Sybarite, as you probably know, is the name given to the people of Sybaris, an ancient town of Greece, the citizens of which were given to self-indulgence and luxury."

He said this with an air of revealing a mystery which hitherto had not been made public. This passion for passing on information was one of his characteristics, and it may be said that, in nine cases out of ten, he really did convey information to the City men with whom he was mostly brought into contact.

Ralph had his private account with Stebbing's, and in a way he could claim a sort of friendship with the banker, who was a member of two of his clubs. If he had one drawback, it was his mild interest in medicines, a source of embarrassment to Ralph, who had almost forgotten his early training.

The fat man sighed heavily as he pulled on his gloves.

"A glass of milk and a few crackers constitute my normal lunch, and I shudder to contemplate the effect that lobster mayonnaise would have upon my system. You're not coming my way?"

Ralph was walking with him to the open door of his car.

"No, I'm not coming your way, though I shall be in your neighborhood to-morrow or the next day."

Mr. Tupperwill shivered.

"I commiserate with you," he said. "The City lacks æstheticism—a cult which, as you may know——"

He stopped suddenly, looked along the crowded sidewalk, and his fat chin wagged downward.

"The cosmopolitan character of our streets at this period of the year is always to me a fascinating and interesting feature."



Following the direction of his eyes, Ralph saw a man standing on the edge of the curb, a slim little man, in a gray felt hat and violet yellow gloves. His face turned at that moment.

"A Chinaman!" said Hallam in surprise.

"A Chinaman," agreed the other soberly, "one Feng Ho, the bodyguard and confidant of one Major Amery, an astonishing gentleman."

Before Ralph had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to ask what the banker knew of Paul Amery, the glistening car was threading its way through the traffic, on its way to the unæsthetic purlieus of Old Broad Street.

The Chinaman was looking steadfastly toward him, but made no move to approach, and presently, when Ralph began to walk in his direction, he turned and moved swiftly away and was lost to sight in the crowd.

Feng Ho, Amery's man! It was the first time Ralph had heard of the Chinaman, and he wanted to get a closer view of him. If all that he had heard that day was true——

But Feng Ho had disappeared, and, looking at his watch, Ralph remembered that he had promised to make a call on his wife. He was paying the cabman at the entrance of Herbert Mansions when, looking round, he saw another cab stop a little distance down the road. A man got out. It was Feng Ho!

Ralph did not hesitate. He went toward the second cab, and the Chinaman awaited his coming with an expressionless face.

"I want a word with you, my friend."

Feng Ho's head bent slightly.

"When I came out of the Fornos a quarter of an hour ago, you were standing on the sidewalk, obviously watch-

ing me. Not content with that, you have followed me here. Now what is your little game?"

Feng Ho's grin was as expansive as it was unsightly.

"Little game? I have no little game," he said blandly.

"I merely come this way; perhaps to-morrow I go some other way."

"You're making a call—where?" asked Ralph roughly.

Feng Ho lifted his thin shoulders in a shrug.

"That is not good English politeness," he said.

"There is a policeman," he nodded in the direction of a patrol. "Perhaps you will send for him and say 'Take this Chinaman and put him in the cooler. His name is Feng Ho; he is a bachelor of science, and he has followed me.' Mr. Hallam, you cannot go anywhere in London without following somebody."

"Why do you follow me?" asked Hallam, ignoring the logic of the statement.

Again that little shrug.

"I am bachelor of science, interested in phenomena. My specialty is crime! Not only do I like to attend the court when a man comes up before the judge and hear the story, but I wish to see the crime when it is committed. A depraved and morbid ambition, Mr. Hallam, but you, as doctor of medicine, will understand."

"What crime do you expect to see here?" asked Hallam, watching him narrowly.

"Murder," was the startling reply.

"Murder!" Ralph wondered if the man were joking, but there was no trace of a smile on his immobile face.

"Murder," repeated Feng Ho, his face beaming. "When Soyoka kills you, I desire to be near, so that I may see ingenious methods employed. That he may kill that antediluvian gentleman Tarn, is possible, or sprightly Miss Marlowe, but that he will inevitably and completely kill *you*, you shall find!"

## CHAPTER XII

### "AMERY KNOWS"

FOR a second Ralph Hallam experienced a wild sense of panic. The very matter-of-factness of the man's tone sent a chill down his spine. Fighting hard against the eerie sensation which for the moment overwhelmed him, he presently found his voice.

"I see," he said between his teeth. "I am to accept that as a warning from Soyoka, eh? Now listen to me, chink! You can take this to Soyoka with my compliments—if he starts anything in this country, he's going to get badly hurt. You understand that? And the next time I catch you shadowing me, you will be kicked. Is that clear to you, Mr. Bachelor of Science?"

Feng Ho grinned.

"To be kicked will be no new experience, learned sir; for, when I was a poor Chinese boy, many men kicked me. But now I am a man, it is different, and people who kick me lose their toes—so!"

Quicker than eye could see, he had stooped. There was a swish of steel, and the point of a knife, which had appeared as if by magic in his hand, scraped a straight white line that missed the toe of Hallam's boot by an infinitesimal fraction of an inch. He was erect again, the knife had disappeared, and he was his urbane, grinning self, when Ralph stepped back with an involuntary cry.

"Too quickness of hand frequently deceives optical observation," said Feng Ho complacently. "How rapidly

could a kicking doctor of medicines become a 'late,' with wreaths and suitable adornments of a post-mortem character!"

And then, as though he himself recognized the futility of further argument, he turned back to the astounded cabman, gave him instructions, and, stepping quickly into the cab, was whisked away before Ralph could recover from his amazement.

Lou was out. Keeping appointments was not her strongest suit, and, having heartily cursed her, he went back to Maida Vale in search of another taxi. He was hardly home before she rang him up. She had been out to make some purchases in view of the coming of her guest that night.

"And I might have saved myself the trouble, for she's just telephoned to say that she won't be able to come to-night, as she has some work to do at home."

"You saw Amery?" he asked, noting the acid that came into her voice.

"Yes, I saw the pig! Do you know what he had the nerve to say to me?"

Ralph raised his eyebrows and smiled to himself.

"Can you guess?" she asked impatiently.

"I guess he referred to your unfortunate habit of acquiring other people's property," he said coolly. "Lou, one of these days your intelligent kleptomania is going to get you into serious trouble. I've heard one or two oblique references to the coincidence of your presence in India with the disappearance of movable property. You're a fool! You have enough money to live on, without indulging in that vice of yours. I never open a paper and see the headline, 'Woman Shoplifter Charged,' without wondering whether you're going to scandalize me."

"You needn't worry!" she snapped. "And if you

think I am likely to help myself to this girl's jewels, you'd better not send her to me."

"She hasn't anything worth stealing," said Ralph coolly. "What else did Amery say?"

"Nothing," she exploded, "except, of course, he knows that I'm your wife. And what's the use of swearing? I didn't tell him."

"How did he know, unless you betrayed yourself?"

"I tell you I didn't! He knew. He must have been having Herbert Mansions watched, for he told me exactly the minute you'd left the flat. Which reminds me," she said, in a changed voice, "I had a burglar in the flat last night, when I was at the theater."

"A burglar?" he repeated. "Did you lose anything?"

"No, that is the curious thing. He opened my jewel safe, but nothing was missing. The janitor thinks he must have been disturbed. I'm quite sure he searched my little writing desk, because I distinctly remember leaving my address book on top of some papers, and when I looked this morning it was underneath."

There was a long pause. Ralph Hallam thought quickly. Was that the explanation of Feng Ho's presence near Herbert Mansions? Was he watching Mrs. Hallam as well as her husband, occupying his spare time by a closer inspection of her belongings?

"Did you report it to the police?" he asked.

"No, it wasn't worth while," she replied. And then impatiently: "When is that girl coming? She's a bit shy, isn't she?"

"I'll let you know," he said and hung up.

Paul Amery had assumed a new significance.

## CHAPTER XIII

### "THE SCANDAL OF SHANGHAI"

It would have been unnatural if Elsa Marlowe had not had her conception of the ideal man. And he had no face, figure, or dimensions, being mainly character and behavior. Her ideal man did not order girls about, as though they were machines; he did not resent a civil "Good morning," or scowl, or fire out interminable letters; he did not dismiss the humblest of his employees with a curt nod; and, whatever kind of face he had, it most certainly was not disfigured by an ugly sneer.

That morning at breakfast Mr. Tarn had made a brief reference to his conversation of the previous day, but happily had not pursued the subject. She would have to leave him; that was clear. But it was not going to be easy. The association of many years could not be lightly broken; and somehow, the more she thought of Mrs. Trene Hallam's offer, even as a temporary measure, the less she liked the idea.

Just before lunch Amery sent for her and dictated instructions to be followed if a telephone call came for him during his absence. She noted, with feminine interest, that he was wearing a new gray suit, and she thought it was an improvement, though by contrast with the light material his face looked darker and more forbidding than ever. When he had finished dictating, he leaned back in his chair, and his eyes wandered to the window. Not least of his unpleasant practices was to talk without looking at her.

"Have you any friends in Shanghai?" he asked.

"I, Major Amery? No," she said, surprised by the query.

"Queer place—full of scandal. I suppose you hear fragments of gossip—yes?"

"No. I know there is such a place as Shanghai, and of course we have letters from our agents there, but I've heard no scandal or gossip. About whom?" she asked daringly.

"Me, mostly. I wondered," he said.

She was fired with a natural curiosity. What kind of scandal or gossip could touch this inhuman man? Yet he must be human on some side.

"Queer place, Shanghai. You know why the bandits held up the blue train? I suppose you don't."

The color and the mystery of the East were comprehended in that short question. She remembered reading something about bandits wrecking a train, robbing the passengers, and holding them to ransom, and she wished now that she had given the item of news a closer study.

If she had expected him to refresh her memory, she was to be disappointed.

"There is a lot of money to be made in Shanghai—straight and otherwise," he said, "but mostly otherwise. That will do!"

As her busy fingers flickered above the keyboard of the typewriter, she found herself wondering which method of making money most appealed to the sinister man, and she supposed that he was not very particular, for the acquisition of money seemed to be his principal occupation just then.

A few weeks before, he had begun to institute a system of economy. Superfluous clerks had been discharged; new printed warnings had appeared above every electric light switch. He was in the habit of making unexpected

appearances in the lower office, where row after row of clerks stood at their high desks, and there had been summary dismissals. Once he had surprised a flushed, disheveled girl, her eyes bright with anger, and had instantly discovered the cause. She had come from one of the little offices which housed the various submanagers of departments, and, without a word to the girl, Amery had walked into the bureau and with a crook of his finger had summoned to him its middle-aged occupant.

"You tried to kiss that girl, I think?" he said.

"If she says that, she's a liar," began the manager.

"I say that," said the sinister Amery, his lip up. "See the cashier and draw your salary up to to-day. You're fired!"

Lawyers' letters had followed this incident, and Elsa had typed a few of the acrid replies. The matter had come up when she was called in to take a letter to the submanager's legal representative, and she ventured to speak for him.

"Mr. Sturl has been ten years in the firm," she said. "He's a married man with a family. Don't you think you're rather hard on him?"

He transfixed her for a second with that granite look of his, and then he said: "I am not in need of advice."

She was so furious that she could have thrown her book at him.

It was characteristic of the change which had come over the business that Mr. Tarn had not been consulted about this dismissal, and even more remarkable that he was too far gone in gloom to resent his overlooking.

She met him, as she was going out to lunch. It was so unusual for him to leave the office until he left it in the evening, that she almost asked him where he was going. She checked herself in time, though he could not have been ruder to her than Amery had been. On one



thing she was determined: she was leaving this establishment at the earliest opportunity. The man had so got on her nerves that she loathed the very sight and sound of him.

Mr. Tarn would have been glad to have such definite views. His mind was in a whirl. Plan after plan occurred to him, only to be rejected, and there seemed no pleasant prospect in life but the quiet of a remote ranch in a foreign country, and the solace of mind that obscurity would bring.

Ralph Hallam had telephoned to him to come to lunch, and it was to the little house in Half Moon Street that his steps were directed.

"I've had a talk with the crowd," said Ralph, when Tarn was seated before a luncheon which would have choked him to eat, "and they agree that it would be best if you got away. Your nerves are gone, and this fellow Amery looks like smashing up one side of our organization."

"It's smashed," groaned Tarn. "Not another ounce can come in through Amery & Amery. I wish I'd never come into the game! Look at this. It was left for me this morning."

His trembling fingers dived into the inside of his frock coat and brought out a letter, which he handed across the table to the other. It was written on very thick and very heavy note paper, in a hand obviously disguised. Without preliminary it began:

You are poaching on our preserves, and, thanks to your blundering folly, the police are working double shifts. We are willing to give you one hundred thousand for the business, you to hand over your agents and agree to dissolve your organization. If you do not accept this offer, we will find a way of clearing you out.

It was signed with a capital "S."

Ralph handed the letter back with a smile.

"If it's worth a hundred thousand pounds to them, it may be worth a million to us. Why did they send it to you, do you think? Because they knew you were the one scared chap in the organization! When did you get this?"

"I found it on my desk this morning when I arrived at the office. Nobody seems to know how it got there."

"Perhaps Amery could explain," said the other dryly. "Did he arrive before you?"

The old man nodded. "I'm going to quit," he said. "We'll divide the money; there's enough to make both of us rich."

"You've got it in ready cash?"

"How else?" said the other impatiently. "If I'd followed your advice, I'd have put it in that fool Stebbing's Bank, and when we went to draw it we'd have found two Scotland Yard men waiting on the doorstep. The money's all right," said Tarn, cheerful for the first time that day. "We'll divide up at the end of the week. I've booked my passage."

"You're a queer old devil," said Ralph, somewhat amused, "and you're sacrificing a fortune. But I think—we all think—that you're wise to take this step."

He got up from the table, lighting his cigar, and blew a ring to the ceiling.

"You'll go alone, of course?"

Tarn shifted uncomfortably. "I suppose I shall," he growled, "but that's no concern of yours."

"It is a very big concern of mine. I've already explained to you, my dear fellow, that Elsa is necessary to me. To be biologically exact, you have more brains than she; but she's smarter than you and with a little instruction, will more than take your place. Now kill that crazy

May-and-December bug that's tormenting you. Go away by all means; you'll be a happier man the moment the Lizard's astern; and, if you are serious about your matrimonial project, why, South America is still full of very beautiful young ladies who would jump at the opportunity of marrying a man with your wad. And honestly, Tarn, I think you'll be a lucky man to get away alive."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other, startled.

"I mean this, that Soyoka is going to be very busy, and you're better out of it."

## CHAPTER XIV

### SCREENING MAJOR AMERY

ALL that afternoon Maurice Tarn sat before his writing table, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his shoulders bent, his eyes half closed, Hallam's warning in his ears. He was fifty-six, and life and liberty were very dear to him. And he wanted—very badly he wanted—to think singly. That was a term he invented himself. And all the time he was thinking trebly, three lines of thought running parallel, only to come together at short intervals into one confused, tangled mass, until they so interlaced and overlapped and ran one into the other that he could not extricate them for an eternity of time.

And then, in the blackest hour of his gloom, came the discovery which was destined, though this he could not know, to bring catastrophe in its train.

"A cablegram, sir," said a clerk. "I think it is in the private code."

"Eh?" He gazed gloomily at the paper that had been laid before him. Looking absently at the signature, he sat up with a jerk.

The sender was a Japanese merchant with whom he had had some dealings on behalf of his nefarious syndicate. Soyoka's firm had discovered this, and that source of supply had suddenly stopped. But it was the presence of a name in plain English, in the very middle of the cablegram, that left him gasping, and he hastened to find his secret code book and write out the message.

And then he saw what had happened. By some aberration of memory the cable that was addressed to him was

intended for Soyoka's principal agent. The discovery left him shaken. The name in plain English!—Soyoka! He had his rival in the hollow of his hand, and his soul was filled with a wild, savage sense of exhilaration which he had not known in years. That was what had happened: the message had been sent to his private telegraphic address—in error.

He sat back in his chair, his breath coming quickly, his face flushed; and thus Elsa found him when she came in to mention that she might be away that night. He did not even reply to her, and the very natural conclusion, drawn from his flushed face and bright eyes, was that he had been drinking.

Soyoka—in the hollow of his hand! So they would threaten him, would they? He would show them.

On her way home that night Elsa turned into Cheapside, and here she saw a familiar figure crossing the road toward her.

"Why, Ralph!" she said. "What are you doing in this industrious quarter of London? I never associate you with the City."

"I had to come east to see a man," he said, falling into step by her side. "Are you taking a lordly taxi, or are you being democratic and boarding a bus?"

"I'm being healthful and walking," she laughed.

They passed along Newgate Street, turned into the Old Bailey, and stopped to admire the pompous face of the Central Criminal Courts. To Ralph the building had a peculiar interest, and he pointed out where Newgate Prison had stood, the place where the little narrow wicket, festooned with irons, had opened into the gloomy jail.

"It makes me shiver," she said and turned away.

"I'll bet it makes Maurice shiver, too," he said incautiously, and she stopped and faced him.

"What is wrong with Mr. Tarn?" she asked. "He has

done something terrible, hasn't he? Do you know what it is?"

But he turned the discussion with a laugh. He was glad enough to reach Elgin Crescent, for he was no pedestrian.

"You're staying at Lou's place to-night; you promised her yesterday when you put her off. Have you told the old man?"

She had spoken to Tarn that afternoon, but doubted if he had taken in what she had said. For some reason which she could not define, she dreaded this coming visit.

"I'm not sure that Mr. Tarn understood me," she said.

"Need you tell him?" he asked quietly. "Maurice is sore with me, for some reason, and I have an idea that, if he knows that you're going to Lou's place, he'll raise objections."

"But what can I say?" she asked in astonishment. "I can't tell him a lie."

"Tell him you're going to spend a week with a friend. If I know him rightly, he won't bother to ask you who it is."

It did not seem entirely to her liking, but she agreed.

"I'll lend you my moral support," he said gayly, and, changing his original intention, which was to leave her at the door, he went in with her, to find, as she had expected, that Maurice Tarn had not yet returned.

She left him in the dining room, while she went upstairs to pack a bag. Again that little doubt entered her mind. She did not like Mrs. Trene Hallam, but she disliked her no more than she would any other stranger, and possibly she would improve upon acquaintance. And there was a very excellent reason why she should go away for a little time. Instinctively she knew that the moment of Maurice Tarn's crisis was at hand, and what might be involved in its culmination she dared not think.

She took longer over her packing than she had intended, for there had arisen a new and preposterous consideration. Would Paul Amery approve? Preposterous indeed! She laughed at herself and resumed her packing.

When she came downstairs, Ralph, stretched in the big armchair by the window, was looking out upon the youth of Elgin Crescent at play.

"The noise these young devils make must get on Maurice's nerves," he said. "What does he do in the evenings—drink?"

She nodded. It was distasteful to her to discuss her guardian. "He hasn't changed his habits," she said.

"No, not if I know him. I'll tell you what he does," said Ralph slowly. "You can check me, if I'm wrong. He finishes his dinner at half past eight, goes to his study at a quarter to nine, has his usual four brandy liqueurs, and then starts in seriously to increase the liquor consumption."

Elsa sighed. "He wasn't always like this. It is only during the past few years that he has been drinking," she said.

He nodded. "A queer devil, is Maurice. I wish to Heaven he'd go to South America."

"With me?" she smiled.

He shook his head. "Certainly not with you. I'm not going to let him take you away."

She very hastily changed the subject.

At eight o'clock Mr. Tarn had not arrived, and Ralph went away, after vainly trying to persuade her to let him accompany her to Herbert Mansions.

"I can't do that," she said, shaking her head. "It wouldn't be fair to him to go away only leaving a message with the servants. I must see him and explain."

"Loyal lady!" he said with a smile. Somehow she did not like his tone.

After he had gone, it occurred to her that, with every opportunity and every inducement, she had not told him about Feng Ho's midnight visit. It was curious that she had not done so. And it was not because she had forgotten that she had not told him. Twice it had been on the tip of her tongue to narrate her midnight adventure, and something had stopped her. And then later, as she heard the unsteady hand of Maurice Tarn put a key in the lock of the lower door, the explanation came to her and left her wondering at herself. She had not told him because she was screening Paul Amery!



## CHAPTER XV

### THE MAN IN THE ROOM

As Inspector William Bickerson wrote the last line of a very long report to headquarters, he blotted, folded, and enclosed the document, and, looking up at the clock, saw it was a quarter to nine. It was at that moment that his clerk came to ask him if he would see Doctor Ralph Hallam.

"Doctor Hallam?" said the inspector in surprise. "Why, surely!"

He greeted Ralph as an old friend. "It is a hundred years since I saw you last, doctor," he said warmly. Again his eyes wandered to the clock. "And I wish I had time to have a chat with you, but I've an appointment at nine. Did you want to see me about anything in particular?"

"If you consider the dope gangs are something particular, then I did."

The inspector whistled. "The dope gangs? Do you know anything about them?"

"I know very little, but I guess a lot; and I suppose you can do some guessing for yourself."

The inspector did not reply at once. Then: "You're a friend of Mr. Tarn's, aren't you?"

Ralph nodded. "Yes, I am a friend. We have been much greater friends than we are at the present moment."

"What's the matter with him?"

Ralph shrugged. "I don't know exactly. Booze, I should imagine. He has taken to it rather badly. Why do you ask if I am a friend of his?"

The officer considered a moment. "Because he's the fellow I'm going to see at nine. He asked me to come round, said he had something very important to say. In fact, he gave me to understand that he had an important statement to make. Do you think that he was drunk?"

Ralph was cautious here. "It may be," he said and bit his lip. "What kind of statement?"

The inspector shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. Are you his doctor?"

"I have been, though I'm afraid my medical knowledge isn't worth boasting about. At nine o'clock, you say? Would you mind if I went with you?"

Again the officer glanced at the clock. "No, you can come along, though, if it is serious, I don't suppose he'll want to say much before you."

"In which case I can go," said Ralph.

Bickerson had risen when the telephone bell rang, and he took up the instrument.

"Hello!" he called, and Ralph saw his eyebrows rise. "It's our friend," said the detective in a low voice, putting the receiver out of range.

"Is that you?"

It was Maurice Tarn's voice, thick and slurred, almost indistinguishable.

"That you, Bickerson? You coming round to see me? They tried to get me to-night—yes, to-night! She's in it. I wouldn't be surprised. She's ungrateful, after all I've done."

"What are you talking about, Mr. Tarn?" asked the detective sharply. "I'm on my way now."

"Come as quickly as you can. I can put you right about Soyoka. I know his principal agent!"

He whispered a word, and Bickerson's jaw dropped.

There was a click, as the receiver was hung up. The inspector turned to his companion.

"He's drunk," he said.

"What did he say?"

But Bickerson was so overwhelmed by that whispered word that he did not answer.

"I shouldn't take a great deal of notice of what he said," suggested Ralph, concealing his anxiety. "The old fool is pickled! Why, he wants to marry his niece!"

"Humph!" said Bickerson, deep in thought. "I've found some drunkards remarkably talkative. Will you come?"

From the police station to Elgin Crescent was ten minutes' walk, and the detective had an opportunity for adding to his knowledge.

"Where is the girl—does she live in the same house?" he asked.

"Usually, but to-night she's staying with a relative of mine. The truth is, she has had a fairly bad time with him," said Hallam, "and Tarn's getting worse. He's scared of Soyoka's crowd."

"What's that?"

The officer checked his step and stared at the other in wonder. "Soyoka—what do you know of that gang anyway?" he demanded.

"Nothing," said the other promptly. "That is one of his crazy delusions. I came to see you especially to tell you about that, and to warn you as far as Tarn is concerned. It is his obsession that he has offended Soyoka."

Every police officer has had experience of that kind of delusion. Never was a great crime committed but some lunatic produced a confession, and his enthusiasm for the interview was a little damped. Doctor Ralph Hallam desired that it should be.

"I don't know why," said Bickerson, as they turned the corner of Ladbroke Grove, "but I had an idea all the time that Tarn wanted to see me in connection with the drug cases. No, he never said so; it was just a hunch. And here we are. You go first—you know your way."

Together they mounted the steps, the inspector following through the broad, open portal. Halfway up the passage they were confronted by the doors, one of which led to the lower part, and the other to the upper floor flat, which Mr. Tarn and his niece occupied. Ralph pressed the bell, and, when no answer came, pressed it again.

"It looks as if it is open," said the inspector suddenly and pushed.

To his surprise the door swung back. They passed to the foot of the stairs, and Ralph felt for the switch. After a while he turned it down, but no light appeared.

"That is queer," he said. "The lamp must have burned out."

Feeling their way by the wall, they mounted to the first landing.

"This is his study," said Hallam, touching a door-knob and turning it.

The door opened. The only light in the room was the dull glow of a small fire, which gave no illumination whatever.

"Are you there, Mr. Tarn?" called the inspector.

For answer came a deep snore.

"Is there a light anywhere?"

The detective's hand swept along the wall, and Ralph heard the click of a switch. But again the lights failed to show.

"That's queer. Where is he?"

It was easy to locate the snorer. Presently Ralph's hand rested on the back of a big armchair, and, reaching down, he felt a bristly face.

"He is here," he said.

At the touch of the visitor's hand, Maurice Tarn moved uneasily. They heard his drowsy grunt, and then, like a man speaking in his sleep, he spoke thickly.

"They tried to get me under. I know, but I'm too strong. Got the con'stution of a horse."

The words died away in a rumble of sound.

"Wake up, Tarn," said Ralph. "Mr. Bickerson has come to see you."

He shook the man by the shoulder, and the snores ceased.

"I'm afraid you're going to have difficulty in rousing him."

"Is he awake?"

"I don't think so. Tarn! Wake up!"

Then suddenly: "*There's somebody else in the room!*" said the inspector sharply. "Have you a match, doctor?"

He had heard the thud of a falling chair and strained his eyes to pierce the darkness. Even as he looked, he heard a rustle near the door, lurched out and caught the shoulder of the unknown intruder. There was a sibilant hiss—three Chinese words that sounded like the howl of a dog; a bony fist caught the officer under the jaw, and in an instant the stranger had jerked from the detective's grasp, slipped through the door, and slammed it. They heard the patter of his feet on the stairs.

"A light, quick!" cried Bickerson hoarsely.

From Ralph's direction came the rattle of a matchbox, a light spluttered and flared. As if in answer to his cry, the electric lights suddenly blazed up, momentarily blinding them.

"Who did that?" And then: "Oh, look!" demanded the detective and gaped in horror at the sight.

Maurice Tarn lay huddled in his chair, his head thrown back. His soiled white waistcoat was red and wet, and

from the crimson welter protruded the black handle of a knife.

"Dead!" breathed Hallam. "Killed while we were here!"

He heard the detective's cry and saw him glare past him.

"What——" he began, and then he saw.

Crouched in the farther corner of the room was a white-faced girl. Her dress was in disorder, her white blouse was torn at the shoulder; across her face was a red smear of blood.

It was Elsa Marlowe!

## CHAPTER XVI

### ELSA'S SECRET

GIVING one glance at the girl, Bickerson hesitated a second and then, running to the door, flung it open and flew down the stairs. The street was empty, except for a woman who was walking toward him. Far away, at the corner of Ladbroke Grove, he saw a bored policeman standing, and he raced across the road toward the officer, who did not seem aware of his presence until he was on top of him.

"Go to 409 Elgin Crescent," he said breathlessly. "Hold the door and allow nobody to come in or out. A murder has been committed. Blow your whistle. I want another constable. You saw nobody come out of 409 Elgin Crescent?"

"No, sir; only one man passed me in the last few minutes, and that was a Chinaman."

"A Chinaman?" said Bickerson quickly. "How was he dressed?"

"He was dressed in the height of fashion, as far as I could see, and I noticed him because he wore no hat. But a good many of these Easterners don't wear hats."

Bickerson interrupted the dissertation on the customs of the East.

"Which way did he go?"

"Down Ladbroke Grove. He took a cab. I was watching him getting into it just before you came up, sir. There it goes."

He pointed to the hill leading to Notting Hill Gate,

and Bickerson looked round for a taxi to pursue, but there was none in sight.

"Never mind about the house—go after that cab. Sound your whistle and see if you can get it stopped. There's another man on point duty farther along, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir," said the constable, as he went off at a jog trot in pursuit of the taxi, which had vanished over the brow of the hill.

Bickerson hurried back to the flat. Whoever the intruder was, Elsa Marlowe would have to account for her presence.

When he got back, he found Elsa in the dining room. She was very white, but remarkably calm. The blood smear that had been on her face was gone, and the handkerchief in Ralph Hallam's hand explained its absence. She turned to him, as he came in.

"Is it true?" she asked. "Mr. Hallam says that my—my uncle has been murdered."

The detective nodded slowly. "Didn't you see?"

"No." It was Ralph who answered him. "I turned the light out. There are things which I shouldn't want her to see, and that was one of them. I switched off the lights before I brought her out. And, thank Heaven, she hadn't seen it!"

Bickerson looked again at the girl. "Yes, Miss Marlowe, your uncle has been killed."

"That—that man did it," she said.

"What man?" asked the detective sharply.

She struggled hard to control her voice, but the experience of the last two hours had brought her as near to hysteria as she had ever been in her life.

"I'll tell you everything from the start," she said. "I was going away to-night, to stay with—with a friend; and I waited at home to tell Mr. Tarn that I should not



be returning for a week. And then he asked me where I was going. I hoped he would not, because there was a possibility that he might object; but I told him, and from that moment he behaved more like a madman than a rational being. He raved and screamed at me, called me the most terrible names, and in his fury he threw a glass at me."

She lifted her hair and showed a cut which, slight as it was, had matted the hair with blood.

"This happened in the dining room; and then suddenly, before I realized what was happening, he grasped me by the arm and pushed me into the study. I think he must have been drinking before he came in. He sometimes stops at a hotel on his way and spends hours there.

"‘You sit down and wait till I tell you to move,’ he said; ‘you are not going out to-night.’ I tried to reason with him, but he was like a man demented, and I could only sit patiently, watching him pouring out glass after glass of brandy, and wait for an opportunity to make my escape from the room. Once I thought he was sleeping, and I got up softly to go. He opened his eyes and sprang up, and he flung me back on the settee in a corner of the room. I was terrified. I don’t think I have been so frightened in my life. I thought he must have gone mad, and I really believe he had.

"Presently he went to sleep again, and then I hadn’t the courage to move. He was talking all the time of what he was going to do to somebody. And then suddenly—this was about ten minutes ago—the lights went out. There are heavy curtains before the windows of Mr. Tarn’s study, and these were drawn. Except for the very small illumination that the fire gave, there was no light at all in the room. I sat still, dreading his waking up and hoping that presently he would be far enough under the influence of drink to make my escape possible.

While I was thinking this, I heard the door creak, and I had the feeling that there was somebody in the room. I was sure of it a second later, for quite unexpectedly a bright ray of light shot out and focused Mr. Tarn."

She shivered.

"I can see him now, with his head rolled over on to his shoulder, his hands clasped on his chest. The light half woke him, and he began to talk."

"Did you hear Mr. Tarn telephone?" interrupted the detective.

The girl nodded.

"Yes, that was more than a quarter of an hour ago. I heard him speak to somebody. It was you, I think. You're Mr. Bickerson, aren't you?"

The detective nodded.

"Go on, please," he said. "When the man put the light on your uncle, did it wake him up?"

She shook her head.

"No; he stirred in his sleep and talked. Then the light went off. I dared not move, thinking it was a burglar. And then I heard your voice coming up the stairs. That is all I know."

"You didn't see this unknown man stab your uncle?"

She shook her head. "It was impossible to see anything."

The detective rubbed his chin irritably. "He was quick—I'll give him that credit. The poor old chap must have been killed while I was within a few feet of him. This will be a fine story to make public!"

He looked suspiciously at the girl. "I shall want your evidence, of course. I'd like you to be somewhere where I can get at you at a moment's notice. Why not go to a hotel?"

"I'll get a room for you at the Palace Hotel," said Ralph.

He had no especial desire that Herbert Mansions should be a place of call for the police in the next few days; he wanted, if possible, to keep his wife's name out of the case, for fear that the connection between her and himself become public. Perhaps Elsa understood that he did not want her to bring his "sister-in-law's" name into the case, for she made no comment and was very glad of the suggestion. She was not in the mood to meet a strange woman that night.

By the time the detective had re-examined her, the policeman had returned with a comrade. A small crowd had gathered in front of the house, attracted by that instinct for tragedy which is the peculiar possession of crowds. By telephone Bickerson sent word of the murder to headquarters, and while he was waiting for the photographers and finger-print experts to arrive, he made a quick examination of the study.

It was poorly furnished. A faded green carpet on the floor, a worn knee-hole writing table, two or three chairs, and a large bookcase comprised the principal furniture of the room. On the walls hung a few old and apparently valueless oil paintings, of that variety which it was the mid-Victorian artists' pleasure to paint. There was, too, a piece of furniture which looked at first like a pedestal gramophone, but which proved, on inspection, to be a well-stocked cellarette.

On the table near the chair, where the body was found, was a full bottle of brandy, that had not been opened, and an almost empty bottle, from which, he guessed, Maurice Tarn had replenished his glass that night. With a tape measure he jotted down a few exact particulars. The chair on which the wretched man was lying was three feet from the fireplace, a foot and half from the table where the bottles were resting, and nine and a half feet from the door. It was obvious that the murderer could not

have passed between the table and his victim, for Bickerson had occupied that space. But there was ample room to pass between the fireplace and the chair, and it was in this direction that the detective at first heard the noise, and an overturned chair on the other side of the fireplace practically located the murderer's movements to the satisfaction of the officer.

There were no documents of any kind visible, except a few unpaid bills, which were on the table where the bottles stood. He began a tentative search of the dead man's pockets, but found nothing that could throw any light upon the crime.

His rough search concided, he went downstairs, past the door where Elsa and Ralph Hallam were talking, and out into the street. The little knot of people had increased in size to a fairly large crowd, and, as he came out to the top step, casting a glance along the Crescent for a sight of the police car, he saw a man elbow his way through the press and advance toward the steps. The constable on guard stopped him, and Bickerson watched the brief colloquy.

The stranger was a tall, spare man, slightly bent. He looked, thought Bickerson, a soldier; the tanned cheeks suggested that he had recently returned from a hotter sun than England knows; and then the identity of the stranger dawned upon him, and he went down the steps to speak to him.

"Are you Major Amery?" he asked.

"That is my name," said Amery. "Tarn has been murdered, they tell me?"

The detective shot a glance at him. "Who told you that?" he asked suspiciously. "Are you a friend of his?"

"I am his employer," said Amery; "or rather, I was. As to the other question, why, I suppose everybody in the crowd knows that a murder has been committed. I hap-

pen to be aware that the occupant of the house is Maurice Tarn. There are only two people who could be murdered in that flat, and Tarn is the more likely."

"Will you come in?" asked the detective and showed the way into the passage. "Now, Major Amery," he said, "perhaps you can tell me something about Tarn. Had he any enemies?"

"I know nothing of his private life."

"You were a friend of his?"

Amery shook his head. "No, I wasn't," he said coolly; "I disliked him intensely and trusted him not at all. May I see Miss Marlowe?"

"How do you know Miss Marlowe is here?" The detective was glancing at him under lowered brows.

"She lives here, doesn't she?" asked Amery. "Really, Mr. Bickerson—oh, yes, I know your name very well indeed—you have no reason to be suspicious of me."

Bickerson thought quickly, and when he spoke again it was in a milder tone.

"I am very naturally looking upon everybody within a radius of three miles as being under suspicion," he said. "I'll ask Miss Marlowe to come down to you, but you're not to take her away under any circumstances. You understand that, Major Amery? I need this lady for further information. She was in the room when the murder was committed. I'll go so far as to tell you what I would tell a reporter."

Amery inclined his head gravely and seemed in no way surprised by what the detective told him. He waited in the hall, staring gloomily out upon the morbid crowd, and presently he heard a light step on the stair and, turning, saw Elsa.

"You've had pretty bad trouble, they tell me?"

His voice was entirely without sympathy. That was the first thing that struck her. He was making a plain,

matter-of-fact statement of an incontrovertible event, and she wondered why he had troubled to see her.

"I happened to be in the neighborhood," he said, "and I heard of this happening. I wondered if I could be of any assistance to you or to the police—though I admit I know much less about Mr. Tarn than you or any of his acquaintances. Who is with you?"

"Mr. Hallam," she said. "He was a great friend of poor Mr. Tarn's, and he is a very dear friend of mine."

"Doctor Hallam?" He nodded. And then, with his usual unexpectedness: "Do you want any money?"

She looked at him, astonished.

"No thank you, Major Amery," she said. "It is very good of you to ask——"

"There is some money due to your uncle, and if it were necessary I would advance your wages," he said. "You will be at the office to-morrow at the usual hour, if you please. It is mail day, and I have a great deal of work to do. Good night."

She could only stare after him, as he walked down the steps, utterly aghast at his callousness. What had mattered to him was that she should be at the office at her usual time. For a second a wave of anger and resentment swept over her, and her eyes flashed toward the disappearing figure of the major.

"The brute!" she murmured and went back to the waiting Hallam.

"What did he want?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "As far as I can gather, he wanted to make sure that I would be at the office to-morrow at my usual time, because it is mail day, and he has a lot of work to do."

"A perfect gentleman," said Ralph Hallam sardonically. "Of course he sympathized with you?"

"No, he didn't say a single kind word. He's just a brute!"

Now that the strain had relaxed, she was on the verge of tears and wanted to be alone, far, far away from that grisly, sheet-covered thing in the study—from Ralph—from everybody who knew her. "Be at the office early!" The man had no heart, no human feeling. It was unthinkable that she should go to the office at all, and she doubted if she would ever go again. And she had done so much for him. She had wanted to tell him then, but had lacked the courage to tell him just what she had done; how she had lied for him; how she had become almost a party to her uncle's murder, that he might be saved embarrassment. But he should know!

There came the sound of many feet on the stairs. The Scotland Yard men were going into the room; the handle of the door turned, and Bickerson entered.

"Do you know this?" he asked.

He showed her a new soft felt hat. "I found this in a corner of your uncle's study," he said. "Have you ever seen it before?"

She shook her head. "No, my uncle never wore that kind of hat," she said.

Bickerson was looking at the inside. It bore the name of a popular store. It was gray, with a black ribbon. If, as he believed was the case, this hat had been purchased by a Chinaman, it was not going to be very difficult to trace the owner.

"You are perfectly sure that the man who came into the room, the man with the flash lamp, did not speak?"

"No," she said, "he did not speak."

"And you didn't see him."

"No, I didn't see him."

"Not even by the reflected light?" persisted the detec-

tive. "It is impossible to throw a ray from an electric torch upon any light surface without some reflected glow revealing the holder."

She shook her head.

"I saw nobody; I only saw the light, and that for a second."

Why was she doing this? Why, why, why? she asked herself in despair. She was shielding a murderer—the murderer of Maurice Tarn. She was lying to save a cruel and remorseless villain from the hand of the law, and she was horrified at her own folly. For she knew the man in the room—had seen him, as the detective suggested, in the glow which had come back when the light had fallen upon a newspaper. And the man was Feng Ho!



## CHAPTER XVII

### "AT THE USUAL HOUR"

ELSA spent a very sleepless night, though she occupied a comfortable bed in one of the quietest of the West End hotels. No sooner did sleep come to her eyes than the memory of that horrible night intruded itself upon her, and she awoke trembling, expecting to see the parchment face of Feng Ho leering at her in the darkness.

And Feng Ho was Paul Amery. Their acts were interdependent, as were their responsibilities. Once she got up and paced the room, striving to calm her mind and sort her values. She must see Mr. Bickerson and tell him the truth. On that point she was decided. As to Amery, she never wanted to see him again, never wanted to mount those narrow, crooked stairs, never answer that shrill bell and go fluttering into his presence, like a rabbit to the fascinations of a snake.

There was a little writing table in her room, and, putting on the light, she sat down, took out a sheet of note paper and began to write.

DEAR MAJOR AMERY: After this terrible happening I do not feel that I can come back to the office again; and, while I am very sorry if my sudden departure puts you to the least inconvenience, I am sure you will quite understand——

He wouldn't understand at all. He would be very annoyed. That lip of his would lift in a sneer, and possibly he would sue her for breach of contract.

She read the letter again, frowned, and tore it up. There was no justification for beginning so familiarly. After all, she was not on such terms that she should call him by his name. She started another letter "Dear Sir," and sat staring at it blankly, until the church clocks chimed four, and a sudden sense of utter weariness made her put the light out and go back to bed.

She was dressed at eight and had rolls and coffee in her room. Again she sat at the writing table, playing with a pen, her mind torn in many directions. The quarter past chimed, and half past; she began another letter. There would be time to send it by district messenger. But the letter was never written. At a quarter to nine she tore up the paper, put on her hat and her fur, and went out.

At five minutes past nine, Miss Dame, waiting in her room, a newspaper under her arm, her brain seething with excitement, saw her come in and literally fell upon her.

"My dear," she said, "how perfectly awful! It's in all the newspapers! I wonder you didn't die with fright. I should!"

"My dear woman," said Elsa wearily, "for Heaven's sake don't talk about it! If you imagine that I want to discuss it—I'm not staying, anyway; I've just come to see Major Amery, and then I'm going."

"Did you faint?" demanded the seeker after sensation. "I'll bet you did!"

And then the merciful bell above Elsa's desk rang long and imperiously. Before she knew what she was doing, she had slipped off her coat, hung up her hat, and, seizing her notebook and pencil, had opened the door of the private office.

Amery sat at his desk, his hands clasped on the edge, his stern eyes watching the door. He did not express

any surprise, either by look or word; seemed, indeed, to have taken it for granted that she would be within reach of the bell when he pressed the button.

"I'm early," he said.

That was the only human speech he made, and he began immediately a long letter to a firm of Indian merchants at Delhi. He did not give her any opportunity of telling him that she had only come for a few moments, to explain why she couldn't come again. She had no time even to be annoyed at his assuredness. It was as much as she could do to keep pace with him. He never gave her a chance to ask a question. When he came to a difficult or a native word, he spelled it rapidly, three times in succession, so that it was impossible she could miss it, or that there should be any excuse for a break.

From the Delhi merchants he switched instantly to a letter to Bombay, but this time he paused midway through to hand her a slip containing a number of meaningless words printed in capital letters, which was to go in at the place he had indicated.

"That'll do," he said.

She rose and stood waiting. "Major Amery, I want ——" she began.

"Get those letters out quick. I want to catch the mail via Siberia. It closes in an hour."

"I don't care if it closes in two minutes," she was stung to report. "There is something I want to say to you, and I'm going to say it."

He put down the newspaper he had taken up, folded it with exasperating leisure, placed it on the side of his tidy desk, and put a paper knife on top of it.

"Well?" he asked.

"My uncle was murdered last night by a man who broke into our house—a man who had tried to break in before. I haven't told the police, but I recognized him.

I saw him as plainly as I see you. I haven't told the police——"

"Why not?" His eyebrows went up, his voice was wholly unconcerned. "It is your duty to give the police all the information that lies in your power," he said.

"I didn't because—because I am a fool, I suppose," she said wrathfully.

Looking up quickly, he saw the unusually bright eyes and the flushed cheeks.

"Who was he?"

"Feng Ho," she blurted. "You know it was Feng Ho. You know it was—you know it!"

He lowered his eyes to the blotting pad, and for a little while he made no answer. She saw the white teeth gnawing at the lower lip and went on.

"I did not want to involve you or your friends in this. It was a distorted sense of loyalty to Amery's. But I've got to tell."

He looked up again. "An excellent resolution," he said. "But I think you are mistaken. Feng Ho——"

"Was with you!" She made an heroic effort to sneer, but failed lamentably.

"If he had been with me," he said quietly, "your story would hold good, because I was in the neighborhood when it happened. No, Feng Ho was many, many miles away from London. Believe me, he has a complete alibi."

"Perhaps his hat has one, too," she said tartly.

He was on his feet in an instant. "His hat?"

"I ought not to have told you that, I suppose," she said ruefully, "but the police found a hat. And a bare-headed Chinaman was seen coming away from the house."

The ghost of a light showed in the expressionless eyes fixed upon hers, flickered for a second, and was gone.

"Is that so?" he said slowly. "Well, in such a case,

Feng Ho will have to have a double-plated alibi. That will do."

A few minutes later she found a word in her notes that she could not decipher, and she was reluctantly compelled to go back to him to secure an elucidation. The room was empty. Major Amery had gone out and did not return for another hour, during the greater part of which time he was waiting at a district messenger office for the return of a boy whom he had sent to a store to purchase a soft felt hat, size six and a half, gray, and with a broad black ribbon.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE STANFORD CORPORATION

At his house in Half Moon Street Doctor Ralph Hallam spent an unusually busy day. Ever since his partner's death he had been realizing, with gathering force, the immense source of embarrassment, not to say danger, which Maurice Tarn's death might well be. If he had only had a chance of a heart-to-heart talk with the dead man before a murderer's knife had cut short his life, he could have made sure of many developments which were now problematical.

He waited impatiently for the hours to pass and for darkness to come; and, though his waiting was enlivened by at least three visits from Bickerson and a telephone call from his wife, the time passed all too slowly.

Ralph Hallam had been reminded how precarious was his position by a letter which had come to him that morning from the bank, pointing out the excessive amount of his overdraft. Ordinarily this would not have disturbed him, for there was a big accumulation of profits from the illicit business in which he had been engaged with Tarn. Neither man favored banks: the money had been kept in dollar currency. There were nearly two hundred thousand pounds, of which half belonged to the dead man and to his heirs.

His mind went immediately to Elsa Marlowe. Unless Tarn had left his money elsewhere, she would be as rich a woman as he was a man, if he made the division. That was a nice reservation, for he had not the slightest inten-

tion of sharing with her, and the mere possibility only entered his mind to be as instantly rejected. All the money that was deposited in the big green safe of the Stanford Corporation was his for the taking. No heir of Maurice Tarn had a legal right to it. He might perhaps give her a thousand or two in certain eventualities; but the idea of dividing this no-man's property never entered his head.

And yet, suppose the old man had left particulars of his nefarious interests, and a legal claim arose? Ralph Halam had spent his life keeping on the safe side, and it would be in his best interests if he made the girl an unconscious partner to the removal of Maurice Tarn's effects.

Elsa had just returned from the office when Ralph's telephone call reached her.

"I want you to come and dine with me, Elsa. There are a few things about poor Tarn I want to tell you."

She welcomed the diversion, for the day had been a trying one, and she had reached a point where she needed sympathy.

"I will come right away."

"Have you seen Bickerson?" he asked, with a half smile.

"Seen him! He has haunted the office! And, oh, Ralph, I'm so sick of it all, and I've got to go to the inquest—stand up and tell all the awful things he said to me! And did you see the evening newspapers? Ralph, they've published a picture of me coming out of the office for lunch!"

He chuckled. "I've lived with reporters all day," he said. "Come along, and we'll curse them together!"

He put down the receiver with a thoughtful expression. That was a good move on his part. There could be no question now of his stealing Maurice Tarn's property.

They would go together and recover the fortune which his industry had built up.

He was glad Tarn was dead—in a way. The man's nerve had failed; he had betrayed himself to Amery. Ralph laughed softly. Soyoka! Tarn had reached a condition of nervousness where he saw Soyoka at every street corner, and identified the mysterious head of the dope traffic in every unlikely individual. And yet he frowned at the thought. Who sent the Chinaman to Maurice Tarn's house? What object would he have had in——

He stopped suddenly. Soyoka would have excellent reason for smashing his rivals.

That combination, of which Ralph Hallam and Maurice Tarn were the heads, had come into existence as the result of an accident. Five years before Ralph had found himself pursued by a host of creditors who threatened to bring him into the bankruptcy court. And then one night, as he and Tarn had sat in a fashionable West End saloon, an acquaintance had drifted in—the wreck of a man, who pleaded to him for a prescription that would enable him to stave off the cravings of his unholy appetite. Ralph had scribbled the prescription, and then a word dropped by the drug victim led Ralph to pursue inquiries from his border-line friends, and he had learned of the existence of a powerful organization which, despite the efforts of the police, was engaged in what was known as the "saccharine trade." Saccharine was at that time the principal article smuggled; and the new and more sinister industry was only then beginning.

Tarn had unrivaled opportunities for engaging in the traffic. He was practically at the head of one of the oldest-established importers in the City of London, for the nominal chief was a sick man and seldom came to the office. When Hallam made the suggestion, he had shown



a little hesitation, but after the enormous profits of the "trade" were demonstrated, he had fallen, and there had been founded an underworld corporation which had its agents in every part of the kingdom and its biggest branch in an American city.

Ralph was a doctor, but he was also a keen business man. His title gave him certain privileges and helped cover the local operations of the gang. A muddled success had been theirs at the start, and then, profiting by his mistakes and tightening their organization, the "amateurs" had come into the market, to the serious inconvenience of the older-established Soyoka.

Soyoka! It might not have been an illusion on Tarn's part—and the murderous Chinaman.

"Soyoka!" said Ralph Hallam aloud.

Elsa came half an hour later, a very tired and a very unhappy girl.

"I think I shall go mad if this lasts much longer," she said. "To-morrow is my last day at Amery's."

"Have you told him you are leaving?"

She shook her head. "I haven't had a chance to tell him anything," she said. "I don't think you know what he's like—he's inhuman! When you remember poor Mr. Tarn served the firm for over thirty years, you would imagine that Major Amery would be distressed. But he isn't. He had a new manager in uncle's room to-day! Ralph, the man is indecent! And he hasn't given me a second's peace. 'I don't want you to take more than half an hour for luncheon,' he said. I wish I hadn't taken any, because those wretched newspaper photographers were waiting outside to snap me."

"You had better cut out Amery's as soon as you can. Has he any idea you're leaving?"

"He takes me for granted," she said angrily. "I'm a part of the furniture. But don't let us talk about him;

I want to forget the sinister man—I want to forget Amery's—I want to forget everything! What did you want to see me about? Something pleasant, I hope?"

"I'll tell you after dinner," he said cheerfully.

When his man brought the coffee and had discreetly closed the door on them, Ralph told her what was in his mind.

"Have you ever heard of the Stanford Corporation?"

Her eyes opened wide. "Yes; Major Amery asked me if I was engaged by them."

Ralph whistled. "The devil he did! When was this?"

She told him of the surprising question that the head of the house of Amery had put to her.

"And of course you said you knew nothing about them? And quite rightly."

"Did uncle know?" she asked, as the idea occurred to her.

"Yes. The truth is that your uncle was running a little business of his own. As a matter of fact"—he spoke very reluctantly, as though he was loath to betray the dead man's secret—"he was trying to build up a trade connection for himself in his spare time; something he could go to when Amery became impossible. I'm not saying that it was a strictly honorable thing to do, because obviously he was coming into competition with the firm that employed him. But, be that as it may. I tried to persuade him against the project, but he was so keen that I didn't like to oppose him. He carried out his plan."

"Then he was the Stanford Corporation? What is it, Ralph?"

"It is a firm of importers or something of the sort," he said carelessly. "I've been to the office once, and the only thing I know is this: he told me that in his safe there were a number of documents that he would not like

to come to light. I've been thinking about it all day, and it seems to me that the best service we can render to the poor old chap is to go along and get those papers before the police find a clew. I don't want the old man's name to be soiled, and Amery is certain to paint his double dealing in the blackest colors."

She looked at him with a frown.

"It doesn't seem a very dreadful thing to have done," she said. "Besides, will they know that he had anything to do with Amery's?"

"It is pretty certain to come out," he said promptly. "Now the question is, Elsa, will you come along with me to Threadneedle Street?"

"But if the documents are in the safe, how can you get at them?" she asked logically.

For answer he took out of his pocket a small key.

"Tarn and I were very good friends, in spite of the disagreement we've had of late, and he gave me this key, as the only man he could trust, so that, if anything happened to him, I should have access to the papers."

Threadneedle Street by night is a howling wilderness, and the building in which the Stanford Corporation was housed was in the hands of the cleaners, when they climbed the three flights of stairs that lead to the floor where the secretive Mr. Tarn had operated. Halfway down a narrow corridor was a door, inscribed "Stanford Corporation," and this Ralph opened. She wondered whether it was with the same key that opened the safe, but did not ask him any questions.

Switching on the light, he ushered her into a medium-sized room and closed and bolted the door behind them.

"This is the *sanctum sanctorum*," he said.

It was an unimpressive office. The floors were innocent of carpet or covering; one rickety table, a chair, and a handsome safe in a corner of the room were the sole

articles in view. Even the electric light that dangled from the ceiling was without a shade.

"It's a pretty mean-looking apartment, isn't it?" said Ralph, who, thought the girl, had evidently been there before.

He put down the bag he had brought on the table, crossed to the safe, inserted the key, and turned it twice. The great door swung open, and the girl saw him peer into the interior. Suddenly she heard him utter a strangled cry of wrath.

"The safe is empty!" he said hoarsely. "Nothing—nothing!"

She looked round quickly. Somebody was tapping on the glass panel.

"Ralph"—instinctively her voice lowered—"look, there is somebody at the door."

She could see the shadow against the panel—the shadow of a man. For a second Ralph Hallam was so dazed by his discovery that he could not understand what she was saying. She seized his arm and pointed.

"At the door?" he said dully. "One of the cleaners." And, raising his voice, he shouted angrily: "Go away!"

"I'd like to see you first," said a voice, and the girl nearly dropped.

It was the voice of Paul Amery!

## CHAPTER XIX

### MAJOR AMERY LOOKS IN

It was Elsa who unbolted the door, and she stood back to let the man come in. He was wearing a dinner jacket, and over his arm he carried an overcoat. He looked from the girl to Ralph, and she saw that half-contemptuous, half-amused twitch of lip, and she hated him.

"You've found your way to Stanford's, after all, Miss Marlowe?" he said. "And do you know that I almost believed you when you told me you had never heard of this enterprising establishment?"

Ralph Hallam had been taken aback for a second, and then the memory of Tarn's warning came to him. This man was Soyoka!

"I brought Miss Marlowe here to recover some money, the property of her uncle," he said, looking the other straight in the eyes. "But it seems that I'm rather late; somebody has been here before me."

The intruder glanced carelessly at the open safe and then looked at the girl. Genuine astonishment was in her face.

"Money?" she said. "You didn't tell me about money, Ralph?"

For a second he was nonplused. "There was money here as well as documents," he said glibly. "The point is that it's gone! Perhaps Major Amery will be able to tell us how it was taken?"

"By Tarn, I should imagine," was the cool reply. "Who had a better right?"

Again he looked at the girl, and she flushed under his searching scrutiny.

"I should keep out of this if I were you, Miss Marlowe," he said. "There are certain occupations that are not good for little girls."

His patronage was insufferable. She trembled in her anger, and if eyes could have struck him down he would not have stood before her.

"You know a great deal about Stanford's, Amery," said Ralph, battling down his fury with a great effort. "Soyoka wouldn't be superior to a little burglary, I guess?"

"Continue guessing," said Amery. Then to the girl: "Now, I think, Miss Marlowe, you had better go back to your hotel."

She could contain herself no longer. "Major Amery, your dictatorial manner with me is unbearable! You have no right whatever to instruct me as to what I should do and what I should not do. Please don't call me 'little girl' again, because it annoys me beyond endurance. This is my uncle's office, though I was not aware of the fact until to-night, and I will be glad if you will go."

With a shrug, Amery walked through the door into the corridor, and in another instant Ralph Hallam had followed, closing the door behind him.

"Now see here, Amery, we're going to have this thing right," he said. "I understand there isn't room in England for both of us, and I think it is fair to tell you that, if any crowd cracks, it will not be ours! There was money in that safe—a lot of money. It was there a few days ago; it's gone to-night. You know all about Stanford's—you've known about it for a long time. That means you've been able to get in and out as you liked."

"In other words, I've stolen your money?" There was a look of quiet amusement in the gray eyes. "I'll

pass one word of advice to you. It has already been offered to your dead confederate. Keep away from Soyoka. He's dangerous."

With that he went away.

Ralph went back to the girl, livid with fury.

"Has he gone?" she asked.

He tried to say something, but his anger choked him.

"So that's Amery, is it?" he breathed. "I'll remember the swine!"

"Ralph, was there money here? You didn't tell me."

"Of course there was money here!" he said impatiently.

"I wanted to give you a surprise. There was a whole lot of money. I know it was here, because Tarn told me the other day."

He searched the safe again, examined a few papers that were in there, and presently she heard him utter an exclamation.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," he said, concealing the sheet of penciled writing he had taken from one of the two little drawers at the back of the safe. "I thought I'd found something."

He seemed to be in a hurry to get out of the office, almost pushing her into the passage before he closed the door.

"Not that it is much use," he grunted; "if this fellow is what I think he is, a little thing like a lock is not going to stop him."

"You mean Major Amery?" she said in wonder. "What did you mean, Ralph, about there not being room enough in England for you both? And about taking the money? Ralph, you don't imagine that he would have taken it, do you?"

She had a confused idea that the money belonged to Amery's, had been stolen, perhaps, and that the sinister

man's interest in its existence was the proper interest that the robbed have in the proceeds of the robbery. Had Maurice Tarn been engaged in speculation on the grand scale? Her heart went down at the thought. If this were the case, all her vague suspicions were confirmed, and Mr. Tarn's behavior was revealed in a new light.

"Was it stolen—the money?" she asked jerkily. "Did Mr. Tarn——"

"For Heaven's sake, don't ask questions!"

Ralph wanted to get away somewhere by himself and read the memorandum. His nerves were so on edge that he could not even simulate politeness.

Elsa was silent all the way back to the hotel, and she was glad when Ralph made his excuses and left her hurriedly at the entrance. She too needed solitude and the opportunity for calm consideration.

Hallam reached Half Moon Street, scarcely noticing the two men he overtook just before he reached his house. His key was in the lock, when a sudden premonition of danger made him turn quickly. The blow that was intended for his head just missed him, and, striking out, he felled the first of his opponents, but the second got under his guard, and this time he saw the flash of steel and felt the grip of the cloth where the point struck.

"That's for Soyoka!" hissed the man, as he stabbed.

Hallam kicked wildly, and, in the brief space of time that his advantage gave to him, he had jerked his automatic from his pocket. In another second his assailants were flying toward the Piccadilly end of the street. For a second his pistol was raised, and then, realizing the commotion that would follow a shot, he put the gun back in his pocket.

Ralph Hallam came to his little study, white and shaken. Soyoka had struck his second blow!



## CHAPTER XX

304 BROOK STREET

EARLY on the following morning Ralph Hallam made a call at Stebbing's Bank, Old Broad Street, and, after the usual mysterious conferences and scrutinies, which invariably accompanied a call upon the general manager and proprietor, he was shown into the handsome board room where Mr. Tupperwill presided.

Mr. Tupperwill, settling his wing collar, offered him an expansive smile, a large, soft hand, and the Louis Quinze chair he kept for distinguished visitors.

"I had your letter, Tupperwill, and I thought it best to come along and see you. I have some money coming to me—a large sum—in the course of the next few days, so you'll have to let my overdraft run."

Mr. Tupperwill pursed his lips, as though he intended whistling, but had thought better of it.

"You can have an overdraft, of course, my dear fellow, but——"

"There is a 'but' to it, then?" said Ralph, a little irritated.

"There is a slight but," said the other gravely. "We run on very conservative lines—from *conservare*, to keep together—in our case to keep together our—er—assets; and, when the scale goes down with an overdraft, we like to have a little collateral on the other side to balance it up again. But in your case, my dear Hallam, we'll let the scale drop down without a balance! How much do you want?"

Hallam told him his requirements, and the proprietor of Stebbing's Bank jotted it down on a tablet.

"That's that," he said. "And now I want to ask you a question. In fact, I thought of ringing you up the day before yesterday, after I saw you, but I thought you would not want to be bothered. Who is Amery?"

"Amery? You mean Paul Amery? I thought you knew him," said Hallam.

Mr. Tupperwill nodded. "I know him; I know also his erratic henchman. Hallam, I'm breaking all the rules of the bank when I tell you that he has an account with us, a fairly big one. He came very well recommended, and"—he pulled at his long upper lip—"I don't know what to make of him. My own inclination is to close his account."

"Why?" asked Ralph in surprise.

Mr. Tupperwill seemed to be struggling with himself. "With our clientele," he went on slowly, "we cannot afford to be associated, even remotely, with dubious projects. My directors would never forgive me if I allowed the bank to be used—er—for purposes which are outside the ordinary channels of commerce."

Ralph Hallam thought of the number of times the bank had been used to further his own peculiar devices and smiled inwardly.

"Why are you suspicious of Amery?" he asked.

"I'm not suspicious of him," said the banker reproachfully. "Suspicion does not enter into the question. I merely point out that Stebbing's is essentially a family bank. We have no commercial houses on our books, and there hasn't been a bill of lading in this office for fifty years."

He looked round, as though he were afraid that some sacrilegious eavesdropper might have concealed himself in that chaste apartment, and then, lowering his voice:

"Hallam, you are a friend of mine, or I would not tell you this. Yesterday he deposited a very large sum of money. I am not at liberty to tell you the amount, but it was——"

Ralph gasped. "Two hundred thousand pounds?" he suggested eagerly. "In American bills?"

Mr. Tupperwill stared at him. "How on earth did you know that?" he asked.

His visitor drew a long breath. "Is that the amount?"

"Well, it was very nearly that amount, and, as you so shrewdly guess, it was in American currency. When I say he deposited that amount, I am in error. What he did was to put into our safe-keeping a box. I may tell you—and I would not tell my own wife, if I were blessed with one—that we do not like these, what I would call, 'secret deposits.' We have a means, which I will not disclose to you, of discovering their contents. There are many things which happen in banks of which you are not aware, but your description of the amount and the nature of the money is very nearly correct—very nearly correct. How did you come to guess?"

Here Ralph was not prepared to enlighten his friend.

The banker rose and began to pace the room slowly, his chubby hands behind him. For a time he did not speak.

"You wonder why I asked you if you knew Amery, and now I'm going to complete my confidence, and you have the fate of the bank in your hands. I've been troubling about this matter ever since I made the discovery, and I've been worrying myself to death as to whether I should tell you. In the box was something besides money. There was a large sealed envelope inscribed 'Evidence against Hallam, to be employed on behalf of S., if necessary.' Those were the words—'Evidence against Hallam'—and who is 'S'? I am not

an inquisitive man, but I would have given a lot of money, a lot of money, to have broken those seals!"

Ralph went a shade paler.

"This morning he came and took the envelope away. Why, I do not know. He mentioned that he had taken it, quite unnecessarily. 'It will be better in my own study,' he said. But where did all that money come from? I don't like it—I don't like it at all. I like money to have a label. I like to be able to announce the place it came from, and how it was earned. That may sound curious to you. Two hundred thousand pounds—a million dollars, almost to a cent! Why doesn't he put it to his account? Why keep it locked up, earning nothing? Fifty thousand dollars, ten thousand pounds' worth of interest lost per annum! That is a crime."

He shook a podgy finger at Ralph, as though he were responsible.

"That is not business. And I do not like a client who isn't a good business man. Now, Hallam, you must tell me where that came from. You must know, because you mentioned the sum and the currency. Tell me."

For once Ralph was not in an inventive mood. He offered some lame explanation, which obviously did not convince his hearer.

Then, most unexpectedly, Mr. Tupperwill changed the conversation.

"One of these days I should like to have a talk with your friend, Mr. Tarn," he began, and Ralph stared at him incredulously.

"Didn't you know? Haven't you read?"

"Read what? I have seen nothing but this morning's financial newspapers. Has anything happened to him?"

"He was murdered the night before last—murdered in my presence," said Ralph.

Tupperwill took a step backward.

"Good Lord! You are surely not jesting?" he said.

Ralph shook his head. "No, he was killed the night before last—as I say, in my presence. It is remarkable that you should not have heard of it. It's been in all the newspapers."

On Mr. Tupperwill's boyish face was a look of almost comical concern.

"Had I known, I would not have troubled you with that wretched letter, my dear friend." He shook his head, almost humbly. "But I never read the newspapers, except those devoted to my own profession, and my valet, who usually keeps me *au courant* with contemporary happenings, is away visiting his sick mother. This is terrible, terrible! Will you tell me what happened?"

Ralph told the story in some detail, and the banker listened, without comment, until he had finished.

"Have they any idea as to who was the man in the room?"

"A very good idea. But unfortunately the fellow we suspect, and who, I'm pretty sure, is the murderer, has proved an alibi. He was arrested late last night on his return from the Midlands. Unfortunately for the police theory, he was wearing the hat which they expected to find he had lost, and his alibi was very complete."

He did not tell how the bewildered Bickerson had put through a call to the Birmingham police and from them had learned that they were satisfied that at the hour the murder was committed, Feng Ho was at the police station, registering his visit under the Aliens' Act.

"One Chinaman looks very much like another," he said, unconsciously paraphrasing Paul Amery's words; "and I imagine that the alibi was very carefully faked, and the person who was with the Birmingham police wasn't Feng Ho at all."

"Feng Ho! Not Major Amery's Feng Ho?" asked the other, aghast.

"Do you know him? Yes, I remember you pointed him out to me."

Mr. Tupperwill's agitation was now complete. "I know him because he has come to the bank on one occasion with Major Amery, and we cashed one of Major Amery's checks in his favor. Feng Ho! That is most surprising, most alarming! What of the poor young lady?"

"I think she will be well provided for," said Ralph, anxious to pass that topic.

Mr. Tupperwill seemed profoundly affected by the news of Tarn's death. He stood, his lips pursed, his eyes vacant.

"I remember seeing a newspaper poster—that, of course, must have been the murder. Extraordinary!"

And then he became the business man again.

"So far as your overdraft is concerned, my dear Hal-lam, you may draw, without any further reference to me, to the extent of your needs. No, no, I will not be thanked. Having expressed the caution which my directors would wish me to express, I have done my duty, and I will give my own personal guarantee. The inquest will be——"

"To-day," said Ralph. "I am on my way now."

Again the banker appeared lost in thought.

"Would you object greatly if I accompanied you to this inquest? Such tribunals are infinitely depressing, but—well, I have a reason."

Ralph wondered what that interest might be, but in his relief that a very difficult financial crisis had been overcome, though the relief was tempered by the news he had heard, he was prepared to endure the company of his

ponderous friend. They arrived at the little court in time to hear his name called.

Until he was taking the oath at the witness stand he did not see the girl, but when his eyes fell upon her face he guessed from her expression that she had already given her evidence. The proceedings held him until nearly five o'clock, when the inquest was adjourned. During this time it was impossible to get near her, and not until they were outside the court did he have a chance of speaking.

"I was rather a bear last night, Elsa, and I want you to forgive me. But my nerves were on edge."

"Mine were, too," she replied, and she saw Mr. Tupperwill hovering in the background.

"I want you to meet my friend Mr. Theophilus Tupperwill," he said, introducing the stout man. "This is Miss Marlowe."

The banker took the girl's hand in his, his countenance bearing an expression of melancholic sympathy.

"I knew your poor uncle," he said in a hushed voice. "I will say no more. 'Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours, makes the night morning and the noontide night'—Shakespeare."

And with the delivery of that profound sentiment he took his farewell.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"Tupperwill—he's the head of Stebbing's Bank and a good fellow," said Ralph. He had never suspected the banker of sentiment. "Are you going to Lou's to-night?"

She shook her head. "No, I can't go to-night; I have to go back to the office."

He looked at her in astonishment. "You don't mean to tell me that Amery expects you back there to-night?" he said incredulously.

"Not only expects, but demands," she said, with a

tightening of her lips. "I am resigning on Saturday. I left him a note telling him so. He has given me no consideration whatever. But please don't talk about him. You can drive me a part of the way, can't you?"

"All the way," said Ralph indignantly.

His indignation was largely assumed. He did not expect any consideration for man, woman, or child from Soyoka's representative, and it would have been inconsistent with his mind picture of the man, if Amery had shown the slightest evidence of humanity.

She thought he was a little distraught on the journey to the City, and she put it down to the natural reaction from the inquest. In truth, Ralph Hallam's mind was considerably occupied by the knowledge that, somewhere in Amery's study, was a heavy sealed envelope, ominously inscribed. His mind went back to the letter that Tarn had received on the morning of his death. The offer of one hundred thousand pounds was understandable, if Soyoka knew where he could lay his hand on twice that amount of money, and probably had already extracted the bills from the safe.

At her request he left the girl at the end of Wood Street, and, in spite of her wrath at her employer, she hurried back to her office in a flutter and was quite ready, when she saw him, to excuse herself for being late.

He was waiting in his room, standing with his back to the fireless grate, his hands clasped behind him, staring moodily at the floor. On his desk she saw, open, the letter she had left for him, and such was the power he exercised over her that she felt a little spasm of unease at the prospect of the reception which he would give to her resignation. The first words he spoke were on the matter.

"So you're leaving us, Miss Marlowe?" he said.  
"You have saved me the trouble of dismissing you."



At this all her fears fled.

"You might at least have had the decency to spare me that offense," she retorted hotly. "I am leaving you for no other reason than that it is impossible for any self-respecting girl to work with you; because your manners are deplorable, and your attitude to women, so far as I am able to judge from my own experience, is so unmannerly and boorish that it is degrading to be at your beck and call!"

He was staring at her, as she spoke, and she thought she saw in his eyes a look of astonishment.

"Is that so?" was all he said. And then: "You told me you knew nothing of Stanford's?"

"And neither did I," she said angrily. "Twice by inference you have called me a liar, and I hope that you will not repeat your insult."

He was taken aback by her vehemence, and before he could speak she continued:

"I went to Mr. Tarn's office without being aware that the Stanford Corporation had any existence except in your imagination. I haven't the slightest idea of the business my uncle was conducting, but I suppose, from your attitude, that it was an improper one. As to how he got his money, and how much money he had, I am equally ignorant. I had no idea that there was money at all there. Doctor Hallam told me there were documents. It was your money, of course? My uncle stole it—is that the mystery?"

"No, your uncle stole no money from Amery's," he said, to her amazement. "So far as I know, he was a trustworthy man—where the firm's money was concerned."

He licked his lips. He had gone back to a contemplation of the blue carpet.

"I'm sorry," he said, though there was no quality of sorrow in his tone. "I seem to have fallen into an error. Of course you knew nothing about Stanford's. He wouldn't have told you."

"Mr. Tarn never discussed his business affairs with me."

"I'm not thinking of Mr. Tarn," he said deliberately. "I am thinking of the excellent Doctor Hallam, who, unless I am greatly mistaken, is scheduled for a very troublous time."

Another long interregnum of silence, during which a little of her old discomfort had returned, and then:

"I'm sorry. I withdraw the statement that I intended discharging you, although I did. If you wish to stay on in this post, you may."

"I have no such wish," she said briefly, and, sitting down at the desk, she opened her notebook.

Still he made no move.

"A chubby man," he said, apropos of nothing, "and a lover of good things. His boast of abstemiousness is part of his vanity. The cracker and milk come at eleven, but he lunches royally at two."

She was gazing, stupefied.

"Mr. Tupperwill," he said in explanation. "I was at the inquest. You would not think Hallam could make friends with a man like that. But Hallam has unsuspected charms."

Was he being sarcastic? She gave him no excuse for discussing Ralph and waited patiently, her pencil poised.

"Feng Ho thinks you are rather wonderful." He broke the silence with this gratuitous remark, and she flushed.

"His good opinion of me is not reciprocated," she said tartly; "and, really, Major Amery, I am not interested

in Feng Ho's views about me. Do you wish to dictate any letters. I should like to go home as early as possible; I have a headache."

She saw his lip curl.

"You think I have been a brute, eh—keeping your nose to the grindstone? But I'll tell you something, young lady. I haven't given you time to think! I have invented work for you, to keep your mind off a certain dark room in Elgin Crescent, where Tarn got what was coming to him for a long time. He had been warned."

"By you?" she asked quietly.

"By me and others."

And then, with an effort, he tore himself from his thoughts, which were obviously unpleasant, and began, without preliminary, the dictation of what promised to be an interminable letter. This, however, it was not. Halfway through he stopped as suddenly as he had begun.

"I think that will do for to-night," he said. "You need not make the transcript until to-morrow morning."

He followed her into the outer office, his coat on his arm, his hat and cane in his hand.

"You are at the Palace Hotel, aren't you? I may want you to come to my house to-night."

"I'm afraid I have an engagement to-night," she answered coldly.

At that moment the door opened, and Jessie Dame came in. She was incoherent in her embarrassment at the sight of the forbidding face and would have withdrawn.

"Miss Dame! I may want some work done to-night, in which case I would like you to accompany Miss Marlowe to my house—304 Brook Street. Will you keep in touch with her?"

Elsa opened her lips to protest, but, before she could

speaking, he was gone, with no more acknowledgment of her presence than if she had been the desk against which she leaned, stricken dumb with anger.

"I'll not go—I'll not go! I told him I was engaged, and I refuse to go to his house."

Miss Dame glared sympathetically; but at the same time she was moved by curiosity.

"I'd rather like to see his house," she said. "I'll bet it's full of trapdoors and secret panels. Have you ever seen 'Sold for Gold?' Amery does remind me of the husband! He used to keep his real wife tied up in a cellar and pretended he was single. And then, when he was leading the other girl to the altar, a strange figure appeared at the vestry door, heavily veiled, you understand—and, mind you, he still thought she was in the cellar—and, just as the parson was going to say 'Who will take this woman to be his wedded wife?' up she springs, takes off her veil, and it's her!"

"Who?" asked the bewildered Elsa, interested in spite of herself.

"The wife—the real wife!" said Miss Dame triumphantly. "The one that was in the cellar. She got out owing to the butler, who'd been stealing money from the man, leaving the door open."

"Anyway, I'm not going to his house," said Elsa.

"There'll be Indian servants there perhaps," said Miss Dame hopefully. "Dark, noiseless men in spotless white. He claps his hands, and they appear as if by magic from secret doors. And idols, too. And incense—incense comes from India, doesn't it, Miss Marlowe? I'd like to see that house." She shook her head sadly. "I'd go if I were you, Miss Marlowe."

"I'll not do anything of the sort," said Elsa, banging down the cover of her typewriter viciously.

"I'll be in the same room with you," encouraged Miss

Dame. "There's always trapdoors in those kind of houses. Do you remember 'The Rajah's Bride?' Ethel Exquisite was in it. I don't think that's her real name, do you? What's your telephone number?"

"You needn't bother to call me, because, if he sends for me, I shall take not the slightest notice."

"304 Brook Street," mused Miss Dame. "A House of Mystery!"

Elsa laughed in spite of herself.

"Don't be absurd. It's a very ordinary West End house; I've passed it heaps of times, and I went there once, when the old Mr. Amery was alive."

"He has probably transformed it to suit his Eastern ideas," said Miss Dame, loath to relinquish the picture she had formed. "There'll be carpets that your feet sink into, and divvans——"

"Divans?" suggested Elsa.

"Is that how you pronounce it?" asked Miss Dame in surprise. "Dyvan? Well, there'll be those. And joss sticks and music. I know those kind of people. Lord! I'd like to see it."

Elsa saw her wistful eyes and was as much amused as she could be.

"One would almost think you were in league with him," she said good-humoredly. "And now you can walk with me to the hotel, for fear I'm kidnapped in the streets of London and carried off to Major Amery's secret harem."

"Even that has been done," said Miss Dame cheerfully.

It was not a pleasant evening for Elsa. She had scarcely arrived at the hotel before the girl rang her up and asked her whether she had changed her mind. At intervals of half an hour she heard the anxious voice of the seeker after romance.

"Don't be silly, Jessie," she said sharply. This was after the fifth time; she had had her dinner and gone to

her room. "He hasn't sent for me; and if he sends, I shall not go."

"I shall call up every half hour till half past eleven," said the determined female at the other end of the wire. "You can trust me, Miss Marlowe!"

Elsa groaned and hung up the receiver.

It was a few minutes before eleven when the telephone rang, and, thinking it was Jessie Dame, Elsa was in two minds about answering the call. When she did so, the voice that greeted her was Amery's.

"Is that Miss Marlowe? Major Amery speaking. Get a cab and come round to my house, please. I have sent my housekeeper to fetch Miss Dame."

"But, Major Amery, I am going to bed."

*Click!* The receiver was hung up.

Here was her opportunity for asserting her independence. She had been a feeble, weak-kneed creature, deserving the contempt of every self-respecting woman. He should not order her about as though she were a slave. She would show him that he could not force her will. She sat determinedly on the bed, her eyes fixed on the telephone bell, and when it rang, as it did after a quarter of an hour's interval, she jumped.

"Is this Miss Marlowe?" The voice was impatient, almost angry. "I am still waiting for you. Miss Dame has already arrived."

Elsa sighed wearily. "I'll come," she said.

She tried to persuade herself that it was only because she could not leave Jessie Dame in what that imaginative lady had described as "The House of Mystery" that she was going, and only because she was humoring the gaunt girl in her desire for sensation. But she knew in her heart that she was yielding to the domination which the sinister man had established, and she hated him more than ever.

A very prosaic butler opened the door to her, and a little, middle-aged woman, eminently respectable, took her up into the drawing-room, where she found Jessie Dame sitting on the edge of a chair, her lips tightly pressed together, her magnified eyes looking disapprovingly upon the extremely Western character of the room.

It was very large and a little old-fashioned, with its cut-glass chandelier converted for the use of electric current, its high-backed Chippendale chairs and ancient cabinets. The carpet, tortured with floral designs, scrolls, and coarse-skinned Cupids, was distinctly Victorian. Elsa could well understand Miss Dame's disappointment.

The sinister man was nowhere in sight, and they were left alone together.

"Have you seen him?" hissed Miss Dame.

"No."

"He's nothing much to look at," deprecated Miss Dame, "but there's a Chinese servant here. You've got to be careful!"

She put her finger to her lips, as the door opened, and Amery came in. He was in evening dress, and, from the scowl that puckered his forehead, she guessed that he was in his usual mood.

"I didn't expect to send for you to-night," he said brusquely, "but something has happened which has given a very serious aspect to my little joke."

His little joke! She gasped. Was that his idea of humor, to suggest he might send for her at any moment? Apparently it was, for he went on:

"I am relying upon you girls to treat this matter as strictly confidential. You will hear things to-night which certain people would be very glad to know, and which they would pay a large sum of money to learn."

He clapped his hands twice, and Miss Dame's eyes glistened eagerly, as a door at the far end of the room

opened, and a Chinaman came in. It was not Feng Ho, but a little man in a blue silk coat and a sort of white petticoat. He stood with his hands concealed in his sleeves, his head bowed respectfully, and there was a rapid exchange of question and answer in some hissing language, which the girl guessed was Chinese. When they had finished:

"Will you come this way?" said Amery and walked toward the open door.

The Chinaman had disappeared, and, after a second's hesitation, conscious that Miss Dame's hand was clutching her arm with bruising tightness, Elsa followed the head of the house of Amery into a smaller room, from which opened three doors. Amery turned the handle of the first of these, opened the door and stepped in, holding up his hand to warn them to remain. Presently his face reappeared round the edge of the door.

"Come in, please," he said, and Elsa, with a wildly beating heart, walked into the well-lit room.

To all appearances a servant's bedroom, its dimensions were limited, and the furniture consisted of a bed, a strip of carpet, and a wardrobe. On the bed lay a man, and at the sight of him the girl was speechless with concern and amazement.

His face white as death, his head and one hand heavily bandaged, the stricken man greeted her with a cheerful smile.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured.

"Meet Mr. Theophilus Tupperwill, the eminent banker," said Amery.



## CHAPTER XXI

### THE SIGNED STATEMENT

WITH a pathetic smile Mr. Tupperwill greeted the girl. "We have met under happier circumstances," he said. "This is the young lady who——"

"We will take your statement," interrupted Amery characteristically, as he turned to Elsa. "Our friend has had a very unpleasant turn, and is anxious—or, rather, I am anxious—to see his experience recorded in black and white."

"Very businesslike," murmured Mr. Tupperwill.

"And signed," added Amery, and the girl noted the extra emphasis he gave to the word.

The sinister man was touching the bandage on the man's head, and she saw Tupperwill wince.

"Not bad for an amateur," he said, with a pride which was almost human. "Now, Mr. Tupperwill. Have you brought your book, by the way?"

Elsa nodded. What was the meaning of this strange scene? Out of the corner of her eye she could see that Jessie Dame was quivering with excitement. At last this lover of the sensational had been brought into actual touch with a happening out of the ordinary.

Amery went out and returned with a chair, which he planted down with unnecessary noise near the wounded man's bed.

"Now, Miss Marlowe," he said curtly.

The banker turned his head with a grin of pain.

"Very businesslike," he murmured again. "You

would like me to make this statement? Now where shall I begin?"

She thought, from the position of his lips, that he was trying to whistle, but Amery, who knew him better, guessed the meaning of the grimace.

"I think I had better start with my dinner," said Mr. Tupperwill slowly. "I dined at home—a deviled sole, a little chicken, and a soufflé—I don't think there was anything else. I had my coffee, and then, at a quarter past ten, I took my evening stroll, three times round the block—an exercise which is necessary to me, for I am a poor sleeper. Usually I take my little dog for a walk, but this evening poor little 'Tamer' was suffering from injuries inflicted by a large, undisciplined dog that he met in the park, and I walked alone. I did not in consequence deviate from my usual route, but went my customary round, passing along Brook Street to Park Lane and returning by the same route.

"I was halfway along the street, which at that time of night is a very quiet thoroughfare, when I saw a car drive up to the curb, and two men got out. A third man now appeared upon the scene, and suddenly, to my horror and amazement, all three began to fight! Though not of a pugnacious nature, I made my way quickly to the spot, with the idea of inducing them to desist. It was, in all the circumstances, a very hazardous decision for a man who is not especially athletic, and I have very good reason for regretting my action. I saw that the two assailants were powerfully built men. The third, whom they were attacking, I could not see, because they had wrapped his head in a cloth of some description though he was still struggling violently.

"No sooner did I appear on the scene than somebody struck me, and I lost consciousness and did not wake until I found myself in the hands of Major Amery and a pass-

ing pedestrian, who kindly assisted the major to bring me into his house, at the door of which I had been attacked."

"You have forgotten the letter," said Amery dryly.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes! All my ideas are at sixes and sevens. Please put in your statement that after dinner my footman brought me a letter which he said he had found in the letter box. I opened it and discovered a sheet of paper with four words. 'You talk too much.' Those were the words; the original may be seen. Exactly what they mean, or to what act of loquacity they refer, I cannot guess. I am habitually and by nature a—a person extremely reserved. That I could talk too much in any circumstances is unthinkable. Now, are there any questions you would like to ask me, Major?"

"The car was gone, of course, when you were found?"

"Yes, and the man also. You say you saw nothing of them?"

"Yes, I saw them," said the other carelessly. "At least I saw a car. Have you got that, Miss Marlowe?"

Elsa nodded.

"You will find a small typewriter in my study. Mrs. Elman will show you the way. I would like that statement typed and signed."

She went out with Jessie Dame, the latter so thrilled that her voice was a squeaky twitter of sound.

"What do you think of that?" she asked, when they were alone together in the plain little study to which the housekeeper had taken them. "Have you ever heard anything like it? Doesn't that beat the pictures! As I always say, there's more villainy happens in real life than people know. Who do you think it was, Miss Marlowe?"

Elsa's mind was in a turmoil.

"I don't know whether Major Amery has a grudge

against this man," she said slowly, "but I have heard and read about those sham street fights, which are intended to bring innocent people within reach."

Miss Dame gasped and flopped down on a sofa, which was the nearest to a "divvan" she had seen.

"You don't mean that the sinister man got up this quarrel to catch Mr. Tupperwill?"

Elsa shook her head. "I don't know what to think," she said.

For some reason she did not wish to discuss Amery with the girl, but, as she recalled Amery's callous indifference and his eagerness to have a signed statement which obviously would exculpate himself, her suspicions grew.

Why did he not go to the police? It was unthinkable that he should have any quarrel with Tupperwill. There seemed no grounds, except that he was a friend of Ralph. But, if that were the case, and Tupperwill could be regarded as an enemy who had "talked too much," how easy it would be to engineer that scene in Brook Street! He must have known something of Tupperwill's habits. Probably at the same hour every night the stout man took his constitutional along Brook Street. A creature of habit, playing into the hands of these men—She shivered. It did not bear thinking about.

Searching the table where the typewriter stood for a sheet of blank paper, she saw there was none suitable; but she did not like to open any of the drawers. Then, glancing quickly around the room, her eyes rested on a small cupboard of unpainted pine. It was evidently a new fixture. Miss Dame intercepted the look.

"Do you want paper, dear?" she asked and half rose. But Elsa was already on her feet.

"It may be here," she said.

The door of the cupboard was ajar. She pulled it

open and found, as she had expected, a number of shelves with library requirements. She found something else—a short length of material which she recognized as rhinoceros hide, and which the South Africans call “sjambok.” Mr. Tarn had had a walking stick made of the skin. In length it was about twenty inches, and it was almost as thick as her wrist. She would not have noticed it, but for the fact that it lay upon a package of paper which was sprinkled with some dark stain. She opened the cupboard wider. The stain was blood, and, repressing her desire to announce her find, she picked up the thing gingerly and brought it to the light. And then she saw that the end was red and still wet!

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE TRUTH ABOUT TARN

THE mystery of Mr. Tupperwill's injury was a mystery no longer. This was the weapon that had been used, and the hand that had struck him down was the hand of Paul Amery. He must have come straight into the study, which was the first room off the hall, thrown the stick into the cupboard and forgotten about it, and then gone out to pretend he was assisting the unfortunate banker. Probably the presence of that chance pedestrian saved Tupperwill's life. She shuddered and, clutching at the package of paper, came back to the table.

"Why, Miss Marlowe, what is the matter?"

Jessie Dame stared in stupefaction at the change in the girl's color.

"I don't know. I'm a little upset, perhaps," said Elsa unsteadily.

She tore open the package, fixed a sheet in the machine, and, biting her lip, concentrated upon the statement. While she typed, the hideous thing became more clear. Her theory was substantiated. She had just finished when Amery came into the room. He took the paper from her hand, corrected two typing mistakes, and went out of the room again.

"One of you girls come," he said "I want a witness."

Jessie Dame followed him before she realized that she was unattended. She came fluttering back a few minutes later with the announcement that she had "witnessed the deed," and that Mr. Tupperwill was sitting up and had expressed his intention of going home.

"And I'm certain as certain can be," said Miss Dame dramatically, "that your theory as to how the murder was committed is true. When I say 'murder,' I mean it might have been murder. They were waiting for this poor——"

"Jessie Dame, you are to forget what I have said."

Elsa was surprising herself by her fatuous defense of the man.

"It is much more probable that Mr. Tupperwill's theory is correct: that the two were strangers, that they were attacking a third person, and that, thinking Tupperwill was interfering, they struck him down."

Through the open door she heard footsteps in the passage, and presently Mr. Tupperwill, looking very wan and limp, came in.

"A little brandy, I think, will do you a whole lot of good," said Amery. He opened a cellarette and poured out a small brown potion.

"Brandy—yes, thank you," muttered the banker. "There is one other statement I should like to have made. I ought to have described the man they were taking away, but I forgot that part."

"You didn't see his face, I understand?"

"No, I didn't see his face. As far as I could tell, he was a shortish man, dressed in a yellowish kind of tweed. The trousers," said Mr. Tupperwill soberly, "I could swear to."

"I am seeing Mr. Tupperwill home." Amery was addressing the girl. "I don't think I have any further need for you to-night. Thank you for coming."

It was on the tip of Elsa's tongue to retort that she hoped her wasted evening would count as overtime, but so many things came to the tip of her tongue and went no further in the presence of this forbidding man. She got rid of Jessie Dame as quickly as she could and,

going straight to the hotel, called up Ralph and told him what had happened.

"You're not in bed yet?" asked Ralph quickly. "I mean, can I see you if I come round?"

"Why, yes," she said in surprise, "but I can see you in the morning."

"No, I must see you to-night. I can't talk over the phone. Will you be waiting for me in the vestibule?"

She looked at the watch on her wrist; it was then half past eleven.

"Yes, I'll risk my reputation. Come along," she said.

He was with her in a remarkably short space of time and learned in detail the story of Tupperwill's alarming experience. Elsa had thrown discretion to the wind. She felt that, in this case, at any rate, she need show no reluctance in relating her employer's business. When she had finished, Ralph was looking at her strangely.

"So that is it! He talks too much! The devil must have learned what Tupperwill told me this morning, though how on earth he overheard, beats me. First Tarn, then the money, and now Tupperwill. Soyoka stops at nothing."

"Soyoka? Why, that's the drug man, isn't it? Oh, Ralph!"

At that moment was revealed in a flash the mystery that had so puzzled her.

"Soyoka! The drug gangs! There are two—one Soyoka, the other—not Mr. Tarn!" she breathed.

He nodded. "You've got to know sooner or later."

"And you?" she asked, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"And me also," he said coolly. "There's no sense in being shocked, Elsa. It is a commercial proposition. You wouldn't object to meeting a distiller or a brewer,



just because a few fellows couldn't hold liquor and behave like gentlemen?"

"Soyoka!" she said again. "Major Amery?"

"He's either Soyoka or his big man."

"And Mr. Tupperwill?"

"He's nothing," said Ralph impatiently. "Tupperwill is just my banker, and he happens also to be Amery's banker. He told me that he didn't like the account on his books—that was one of the things he said. Amery has come to know, and to-night the gang went out to teach Tupperwill a lesson. And I can prove it, and you can prove it," he said. "To-morrow morning Amery will close his account at Stebbing's Bank and bring away all his deed boxes. By gad! If I only knew——"

His eyes were bright, and his voice quivered with excitement. As for the girl, she felt physically sick at the revelation.

"It is too dreadful, too dreadful!" she said in a low voice. "I can't believe that men could be such brutes! Was that money, Ralph, the money that?"—she hesitated—"uncle earned, and you——"

Her look of hardly concealed disgust irritated him.

"That's not the way to look at it," he said. "I tell you that it's just a commercial proposition. Against the law, perhaps, but then many things are. It is no worse than rum running, and I know of some decent people who are making money——"

"Not decent, surely!" she said, with a sudden revival of her old self. She rose. "I'll have to think this over," she said and went up to her room, her mind in a turmoil.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### "PERFECTLY HORRIBLE"

ONE very definite conclusion she reached, when she was putting on her shoes preparatory to going to that hateful office—her connection with Amery's was practically finished. Why she did not proclaim the man's infamy from the housetops puzzled and frightened her. Was her moral code so loose that she could condone one crime of which she had proof and another which she suspected?

How would he appear to her now, she wondered, now that she knew him for what he was, a man who was living by debasing humanity, a cruel, brutal thug, who could strike down an unoffending man because he had dared break some rule of the bank?

Her way eastward led her past the great newspaper offices, and, obeying an impulse, she turned into the publisher's department and began a search of the files. Presently she found the paragraph she had read to her uncle that morning, and which—now she well understood why—had thrown him into such a state of agitation.

A stray reporter who drifted in, en route to the cashier's desk, saw a pretty girl turning the pages and noticing that she was not scanning the advertisement columns, sidled up to her.

"Can I help you?" he asked. "I'm on the staff of the paper."

Her first inclination was to decline his assistance. . But

she had recalled something Major Amery had said, and she was debating whether it would be too long a job to find the news she wanted, when he appeared upon the scene.

"I'm trying to find an account of the holding up of the Chinese train."

"Oh, the Blue Train outrage? You won't find it on that file. It happened months ago," he said.

"Do you remember why it was held up?"

The youthful reporter smiled. "To get a little easy money, I guess," he said. "There were one or two wealthy opium smugglers on the train."

Opium again! She drew a long sigh.

"Thank you very, very much," she said and hurried out to the disappointment of the young connoisseur of feminine elegance.

It was curious, she thought, when the bell called her to his presence, that Amery did not look any different. She thought that, in the light of her knowledge and a keener scrutiny, she would detect some evidence of his callousness. There must be that in his face which would betray his evil mind. But, no, he was just what he had always been, and, for his part, neither his manner nor his tone revealed the slightest difference in his attitude toward her, except that for once he was gracious.

"I am much obliged to you for coming to me last night," he said. "You will be delighted to learn that Mr. Tupperwill passed an excellent night, and the doctor thinks that he will be able to go to business in a few days."

Was there an undercurrent of mockery in his tone? She thought there was and could only marvel at his cool brutality.

"And what comfort had Doctor Hallam to offer you?" he went on.

"You watch me rather closely, Major Amery," she

said quietly. "I did not ask the doctor to come to comfort me."

"Oh, you *did* ask him to come, did you? I thought you might have done so," he said. "Was he impressed by the news of Tupperwill's sad fate? I see that you don't feel inclined to discuss the matter. We'll get on with the letters."

The matter was still in his mind at the end of half an hour's dictation, for he asked:

"Was there anything you did not tell him about last night's happenings?"

Quick as a flash came the reply: "I did not tell of the blood-stained sjambok I found in the paper cupboard."

She could have bitten her tongue. The sentence was half out before she tried to stop herself, but it was too late. Not a muscle of his face moved; the grave eyes did not so much as blink.

"I wondered where you'd found the paper and hoped I had left some on the desk. I suppose you think I am a pretty tough case?"

"I think you're perfectly horrible," she said. "May I go now?"

"You think I'm perfectly horrible, do you? And so do others, and so will others," he said. "As for Tupperwill, he should have been a little more discreet."

"Oh!" she gasped. "Then you admit it!"

He nodded. "The lesson will not be lost on him," he said.

She hardly knew whether she was asleep or awake when she got back to her typewriter, and she was absurdly grateful for the unmusical click and crash of the keys, which brought her back to the mental position of a rational being.

She hoped, as she banged savagely at the keys, that

Major Amery's new secretary would have sufficient spirit to shake his self-conceit. She prayed that the unfortunate female—no man would endure him for a week—would break every one of his rules—open his letters and unfasten the strings of his parcels; two of his eccentricities being that he would allow no one to open either except himself. She pictured a steely-faced Gorgon with a heart of stone, who would freeze him to humbleness. As Major Amery had the choosing of his own secretaries, she reflected ruefully, he would probably find some wretched, broken-spirited girl who would accept his insolence as a normal condition of her employment.

She was engaged in inventing a special type of secretary when the bell rang sharply, and she flew in to the tyrant.

"I forgot a letter when you were in here before," he said. "Take this:

"TO THE MANAGING DIRECTOR, STEBBING'S BANK,

SIR: I am this day closing my account with Stebbing's Bank and have to request that my balance be transferred to my credit at the Northern & Midland. And this further authorizes you to hand to the bearer the steel box held by the bank in my name. The receipt of the bearer, Mr. Feng Ho, B. Sc., should be accepted as mine. Yours faithfully."

She went back to her machine, finally convinced that all that Ralph had prophesied had come true. Amery was closing his account at the Stebbing's Bank.

Paul Amery was the subject of another discussion between two men, one of whom had reason to hate, and the other to suspect, him. Mr. Tupperwill lay in the center of his large bed, a picturesque figure; one white-clad hand gripped a golden bottle of smelling salts, for his

head ached vilely. Nevertheless he had not been unwilling to receive Ralph Hallam and to give him a first-hand account of his misfortune. And Ralph had been most sympathetic and inquiring. But at the very suggestion that his assailant was none other than Paul Amery himself, Mr. Tupperwill had been as indignant as if his own honesty had been attacked.

"Nonsense, my dear man, nonsense," he said, as sharply as his throbbing head would permit. "Amery was nowhere near the place. I distinctly saw the men who attacked me. There may have been a third person, but I very much doubt it. There was not even a chauffeur on the box of the car. Why on earth should Amery attack me?"

There was excellent reason, thought Ralph, but this did not seem the moment to make a disclosure.

"It struck me as possible," he said. "Amery is a wildish kind of fellow."

"Rubbish! Stuff! Excuse the violence of my language, my dear Hallam, but it is too fantastic to discuss the two wretched assassins—which word, by the way, comes from the word Hassan, the old man of the mountains who first employed murderers to settle his private feuds. Neither of these two were Amery, I'll swear."

Very wisely Ralph did not press the point.

"At the same time," Mr. Tupperwill went on, "I confess that I do not like Major Amery as a client, and I shall seize the very earliest opportunity of getting rid of his account."

"I think he'll save you the trouble," said Ralph dryly.

"Why?" Mr. Tupperwill's eyes opened wide.

"Because—well, because——" Ralph picked up the letter that Mr. Tupperwill had shown him, read the four words, and smiled.

"Do you connect this warning with the piece of in-

formation you gave me yesterday morning?" he asked.

"About Amery? Good heavens, no!"

"It is the same kind of letter paper and the same kind of writing that poor Tarn received before his death. Evidently written by the same man. And to what other indiscretion, if it were an indiscretion, can this note refer? You have not talked about anybody except Amery and his account?"

Mr. Tupperwill was silent for a moment, stupefied by the suggestion.

"Pshaw!" he said at last. "He could not have known of our conversation. It took place in my private office, where it is impossible, absolutely impossible, that we could have been overheard."

"You have a loud-speaking telephone on your office desk; was that switched off?"

"I think so," said Mr. Tupperwill slowly. "It is almost second nature to make it dead. I can't say that I am exactly comfortable with that wretched American invention, and I've thought once or twice of having it removed. It is very useful, for I have only to stretch out my hand and turn a switch to talk to any of my departments, but it is dangerous, very dangerous. Now I wonder!"

He pulled at his lip for a long while, trying to remember.

"It is unlikely," he said, "but there is just the possibility that the switch may have been down. Even in that case, who of my staff would betray me? No, my dear man, you must get that idea out of your head. It isn't possible. There is nothing wrong with Amery. I am almost sorry I expressed my doubts to you, if by so doing I have sown the seeds of suspicion in your mind."

Ralph chuckled quietly. "In my case they're already in flower," he said. "I admit I'm prejudiced against Amery and would go a long way to do him a real bad

turn." Then, seeing the shocked expression on the other's face, he went on:

"Not that I shall."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Mr. Tupperwill fervently. "I have always disliked violence, and now I have a greater antipathy than ever." He touched his head tenderly.

Ralph said no more than the truth, that the thought in the foreground of his mind was an opportunity of getting even with the man whom he now hated with unparalleled intensity; and that afternoon opportunity took shape.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE POISON TEST

"You're determined to go on Saturday, Miss Marlowe?"

"Yes, Major Amery."

Amery stood at the window, his hands in his pockets, glooming into the street.

"You will be rather difficult to replace," he said. "Could you overcome your very natural reluctance to serve me for another week?"

She hesitated and was almost lost. If he had ordered her to remain, she might not have had the courage to refuse to obey the order.

"I'm afraid I cannot stay after Saturday, Major Amery."

Somehow she did not expect him to press her to stay then, nor was any further reference made to the attack on Mr. Tupperwill. Though she had nothing but the kindest feeling for Jessie Dame, she ventured to suggest that the girl should take her place when she had gone, for the position was a coveted one and carried a salary twice as large as the highest wage earned by the most expert stenographer in the firm.

"She can't spell," was his only comment, and in a way Elsa was glad.

If she expected him, knowing his pertinacious character, to renew his request later in the day, she was disappointed. At four thirty the office caterer brought two tea trays, and one of these, as usual, she carried into

Amery's room. She put the tray down on his desk, and he nodded, lifted the lid of the teapot, and smelt it—a practice of his she had noticed before. This time he looked up before her faint smile had completely vanished.

"That amuses you, eh? I'll show you something else that will amuse you more."

He took a little flat case from his pocket, opened it, tore off a narrow slip of sky-blue paper, which he dipped into the milk. When he brought it out, the paper was red.

"Wait," he said and poured the tea into the cup, and this time he produced a thin pink slip.

Looking, she saw that the interior of the case held nothing but hundreds of these pink and blue slips. The pink paper he dipped into the tea, held it for a few seconds, and then drew it out. Where the tea had touched, the paper was a bright lemon yellow.

"A rough test, but reliable. Arsenic turns the milk paper green and the tea paper purple. Strychnine turns them both black, so does aconite. Cyanide, on the other hand, bleaches the blue paper white and turns the pink paper to a deep red."

Elsa listened, open-mouthed.

"You—you were testing for poison?" she said, almost unable to believe her ears.

"Something like that," he said and, replacing the case, put the milk and sugar in his tea. "By the way, that is one symptom of insanity—the notion a man gets that he's being poisoned, or that somebody is attempting his life."

"But poison here!" she said skeptically.

"Well, why not? I have many enemies, and one, at least, is in the medical profession."

At any other time she would have resented this reference to Ralph Hallam, but now the relationship in

which these men stood, the knowledge of Ralph's terrible business, silenced her.

Crook against crook—diamond against diamond! Surely he did not dream that Ralph would do so horrible a thing! That he should judge other men by himself was a human weakness. Perhaps he was mad, after all. He did not act like a normal being. And yet she saw none of the symptoms which she associated with an ill-balanced mind. He was a mystery, inscrutable. She had read stories of criminals who were endowed with a greatness which distinguished them from the rest of mankind, wonderful mentalities perverted to base use. Perhaps the sinister man was one of those, an object for compassion rather than contempt. On the whole she was very glad that her term of employment was coming to a rapid close.

After tea some letters and a parcel came for him. She put the letters on the blotting pad—he was out—and placed the parcel within reach of him. It had come by hand and was addressed: "Major Amery, D. S. O." It was the first intimation she had had that he held the Distinguished Service Order. She was constantly finding out new things about him, she thought whimsically, and, absorbed in the discovery, she took up a pair of scissors and cut the string that fastened the parcel. Invariably she had done this for old Mr. Amery, and she never realized that the scissors were in her hand till a snarl of anger made her spin around, affrighted. Amery stood in the doorway leading to the corridor.

"What in thunder are you doing?" he roared.

She fell back before the blaze of his eyes. He was so menacing, his mien was so savage, his voice so harsh that he terrified her.

"How often have I told you not to open my parcels?" he growled.

His hand had dropped on the top of the cardboard box she had exposed.

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry. I had forgotten."

The brown face was sallow. Was that his way of going pale?

"Do as you're told," he said and lifted the box carefully in his hand, waited a second, and then rapidly took off the lid.

Reposing in a nest of white cotton wool was a round object, covered with white tissue paper. He did not touch it. Instead, he took up the scissors she had put down, snipped gingerly at the paper, and pulled a large piece aside.

"Fond of apples?" he asked in a changed voice.

It was a very small apple, but like no apple she had ever seen, for it bristled with steel needle points.

"That's medical, I'll swear," he said, and she saw his lip lift. "He used a hundred needles, and there's death in every point! The cute cuss!"

There was genuine admiration in his voice.

## CHAPTER XXV

### LAUDANUM

"RATHER ingenious," said Amery. "Not heavy enough for a bomb, and when one opened the package, what more natural than to seize this paper-covered little ball?"

"But are they poisoned?" she asked, bewildered. "With what?"

"I don't know. An analyst would find out if I took the trouble to send it to an analyst. Anthrax, probably, or one of a dozen other diseases. There is enough venom in the sac of the average cobra to supply all those little points with a fatal dose."

He carefully put the lid on, tied a piece of string round the box, and, opening a cupboard, locked it away.

"Who sent it? Not Ralph—not Doctor Hallam? You don't for one moment imagine he would do such a thing?"

"Hallam?" He bit his lip thoughtfully. "No, probably not Hallam."

"Are you Soyoka?" she blurted, and he brought his gaze round to her.

"Do I look like a stout and middle-aged Japanese gentleman?"

"I know you're not a Japanese," she said impatiently, "but are you Soyoka's agent?"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked toward the cupboard. "Apparently there are people who think I am. Doctor Hallam? No, I don't think it was Doctor Hallam.

If I did——” He showed his teeth for a second in a mirthless grin, and she shivered involuntarily.

“You look dreadful.”

Again she had no intention of speaking. She had surprised herself when she had asked him if he was Soyoka. For a second she thought he would resent her comment, but he accepted it without offense.

“I *am* dreadful—‘perfectly horrible’ was your remark, if I remember rightly. And there are horrible things in this world, Miss Marlowe, things you do not guess and cannot know; things I hope you never will know. Horrible is a word you should never apply to a plain, straightforward dope smuggler—nay, even to a murderer. The real horrors are things that newspaper men do not write about; and when you come into contact with these, why, you find you’ve been wasting a whole lot of superlatives, and you have none left.”

It was quite a long speech for him, and she had an odd sensation of pleasure. She felt almost as if she had been taken behind the steel doors of his reserve.

“I don’t want you to think that either murder or drug smuggling are admirable pastimes. You’re pretty safe in believing that the things your mother taught you were wrong, are wrong, and not all the gilding or high-class thinking, or abstruse philosophy in the world can make them right. I suppose you think those are queer sentiments coming from Soyoka’s right-hand man?”

There was a peculiar glint in his eye, which she chose to regard as threatening. Perhaps he was unbending because he wished to persuade her to remain with him, but apparently this was not the case, for he did not follow up the advantage which his unusual geniality had created.

For yet another night she postponed her removal to Herbert Mansions. By the weariness in Mrs. Trene Hallam’s voice when she telephoned her, Elsa gathered

that that good lady was as anxious to get the visit over as she. Elsa slept better that night and went to the office refreshed.

She had not been at work five minutes when Miss Dame came flying into the room, and, from her flushed appearance and her startled eyes, Elsa guessed that something unusual had happened.

"Have you heard the news?" hissed the girl melodramatically.

Elsa had heard too much news of a startling character to be wildly excited.

"Who do you think is the new manager?"

One of the under-managers had been temporarily appointed to fill Mr. Tarn's position. That it was only a temporary appointment Elsa was now to learn for the first time.

"He's in the office, sitting there as large as life, giving orders to white Christian people."

"Not Feng Ho!" gasped Elsa.

"Feng Ho," said Miss Dame impressively. "That's the last straw! If Amery expects well-educated young ladies to take their orders from a—from a savage, well, he's got another guess coming. I know what the Chinese are, with their opium dens and their fan-tans and other instruments of torture. Not me, my girl!" Miss Dame shivered in her indignation. "I'm going to tell his nibs."

"Tell him now," said Amery's cold voice.

Elsa always jumped at the sound of him, but Miss Dame literally leaped. Paul Amery stood in the doorway, his hands in his pockets.

"Tell him now. I gather you object to Feng Ho as general manager. I regret that I did not call you to the board meeting which decided upon the appointment, but I like to be alone when I make these momentous decisions. What is your objection, Miss Dame?"

"Well, sir," stammered Miss Dame, going red and white, "he's Chinese and foreign."

"Don't you realize that you're Chinese and foreign to him? As to his being an ignoramus or a savage, as you suggested a little time ago, he is a particularly well educated gentleman. At least he can spell," he added significantly.

Elsa thought this was cruel.

"He may be able to spell in Chinese," said Miss Dame with dignity, "but that's neither here nor there. I'm not much of a speller myself, I admit. Only you can quite understand, Major Amery, that we girls have got to look out for ourselves."

Miss Dame's attempt to drag Elsa into the argument amused the girl. Apparently it amused the sinister man also, for his lips twitched.

"Feng Ho will not bother you, or interfere with you in any way. He will deal entirely with the Chinese trade, which is by far the most important department of our business."

When he had gone, Miss Dame said:

"Wasn't he mild? He must have seen by my eye that I wasn't going to let him start something without my being there to ring the bell. Put a man in his place once, and he stays there. And listen, Miss Marlowe: I had my horoscope cast this morning—at least, the letter came this morning. I was born under Pisces, and I'm supposed to be highly emotional, imaginative, observant, artistic, musical, precise, and prudent!"

"In those circumstances," said Elsa, "I think you may be able to cope with Mr. Feng Ho as general manager. You seem to have all the qualities that a girl should possess in those difficult circumstances."

Miss Dame scratched her head with the end of her



pencil. "It never struck me that way," she said, "but perhaps you're right."

Elsa did not go out to lunch. She had not forgotten her encounter with the press photographers, and until the case was settled she decided to lunch in the office.

It was fortunate that she did so, for Bickerson called to ask, with variations, the same wearying string of questions that he had asked at least a dozen times before—the names of Tarn's relatives, particulars of his friendships, his animosities, his likes and dislikes, his habits, his houses of call, his clubs.

"Is it necessary to ask me all this again?" said Elsa wearily. "I think I've told you this before." And then, as though the thought occurred to her, but was too preposterous to entertain: "You're not expecting me to vary my story? Oh, Mr. Bickerson, you are!"

The stolid Bickerson smiled innocently. "A witness sometimes remembers fresh incidents," he said; "and you can well understand, Miss Marlowe, that everybody in that house when the murder was committed has to be questioned and cross-questioned. It is part of our system of detection."

"Did you cross-question Feng Ho?" she asked.

The smile came off his face. "I certainly cross-questioned him to a degree, but he had his alibi all done up in silver paper; we couldn't have broken it with a steam hammer. Major Amery in?"

"No, he's gone out," she said. "Did you want to see him?"

"No," he said carelessly, "I don't particularly want to see him. If he's there I'll stroll in."

"I'll see," said Elsa.

As she expected, Amery was gone. But Mr. Bickerson was not content, either with the view he had of the

room through the doorway, or with his earlier and closer inspection of the apartment. He strolled in past the girl, humming an aria. He was something of a baritone and had a reputation in amateur operatic circles.

"A very nice little room this," he said. "An extremely nice little room. Would you be so kind as to go downstairs and tell my man at the door that I'm waiting for Major Amery?"

She looked at him squarely. "Yes, I will, if you'll be so kind as to come out of the room and let me lock the door," she said.

He laughed. "You think I'm going to conduct a quiet little search of my own, eh, without the formality of a warrant? Well, you were right, only I've got the warrant, you see."

He produced a blue paper and handed it to her.

"It would have been ever so much better if I could have done this quietly, without Major Amery knowing anything about it, but I respect your scruples, and if you'd rather I waited until the major came in, I will do so."

They had talked ten minutes when Elsa heard the door of Amery's room close, and she went into him.

"A search warrant, has he? I wondered when that would come. Tell him to step in. Good morning, Bickerson. You want to have a look around, Miss Marlowe tells me? Sail right in."

"I've got a warrant," said Bickerson with a shrug, "but that means nothing." And then: "Bit of a tough case, that of Mr. Tupperwill's the other night?"

"Oh, you've heard about it, have you? Who squealed—Mr. Tupperwill?"

Bickerson scratched his chin. "Nobody exactly squealed," he said. "It came to me in the ordinary way of business."

"Was it Mr. Tupperwill, or the excellent Doctor Hal-lam?" persisted Amery.

"Know him?" asked Bickerson, his keen eyes on the other's face.

"I am acquainted with him, yes."

"It is a queer thing, that case of Tupperwill," drawled Bickerson. "I wonder you didn't report it to the police straight away, Major Amery."

"You mean Tupperwill's beating?"

Bickerson nodded, and he saw the thin lips twitch.

"Oh, well, there's nothing to that, is there? Those things happen every day."

"Not in London. They may happen in Calcutta, and they may happen in Shanghai, where the sight of a Chinese policeman half beaten to death doesn't create so much of a scandal as it might in, say, Regent Street or Piccadilly Circus."

"I get you," said Amery.

He opened a box on his table, took out a thin black cigar, and lit it.

"I suppose I ought to have reported it to the police, but it's up to Tupperwill. After all, he was the aggrieved party."

"Humph!" The detective was inspecting the major earnestly. "Curious that affair should happen outside your house."

"Very curious. Equally curious that it should happen outside anybody's house," said Amery coolly.

There was a little pause in the conversation. Bickerson was evidently turning over certain matters in his mind.

"There is a feud between two gangs that are operating in London—two dope gangs—the amateurs and Soyoka's crowd. I have reason to believe that Tupperwill has offended one of the gangs in some way."

"So I understand."

"Do you know how?" asked Bickerson quickly.

"I only know what he told me, that he had had a letter saying that he was talking too much. It seemed to me rather an inadequate reason for beating his head off, for I think you will agree that, if every man who talked too much was flogged for his sins, there would be few people in London, or New York, for the matter of that, who could wear hats with comfort."

Another interval, during which the sinister man puffed steadily at his cigar and watched the windows on the opposite side of the street with curious interest.

"You have traveled extensively in the East, Major. Have you met Soyoka?"

"Yes. Have you?"

He pushed the cigar box toward the detective, and Bickerson helped himself and was now holding a match to the end. He waited until he had most carefully and deliberately extinguished the flame and put the stick in a copper ash tray before he answered.

"I've seen members of the gang, but I've never seen Soyoka. Met them in town. They're a slippery little crowd to hold. The amateurs may be easy, because we've got a line to them. There are one or two men in the Midlands who ought to have received that warning about talking too much."

"You have met some members of the Soyoka gang?" interrupted Amery with polite interest. "You interest me. What are they like?"

"They are very much like you"—a pause—"or me. Very ordinary, everyday people, whom you wouldn't suspect of pulling down a comfortable income out of filling the psychopathic wards. There's thirty thousand pounds a week spent on drugs in this country—

on illicit drugs, you understand—which is considerably over a million and a half a year. There's eighty per cent profit, and the trade is in a few hands. You understand, Major Amery?"

Amery nodded.

"Which means," the detective continued, "that it is worth the while of real swell firms to take up this trade, because it's growing, and the million and a half this year is going to be three millions next year, unless we find the man who will turn King's evidence—State's evidence, they call it in America, don't they?"

"So I understand," said Amery. "In other words, unless you get a real valuable squeak, you don't think you'll catch Soyoka?"

"That's what I mean. I don't think we'll catch him this year. We may have a stroke of luck; we may break the gang by finding the man who murdered Maurice Tarn, whether that man is white or yellow."

"I see. You've still got poor Feng Ho under suspicion?"

"I've nobody under suspicion," said the detective calmly. "Feng Ho had his alibi in good order." He rose to go. "Pretty smart girl, that—Miss Marlowe. I mean. I was going to take a quiet look round your place, but she wouldn't have it."

"Is she under suspicion, too?"

The detective carefully flicked off the ash of his cigar into the fireplace.

"No, she isn't under suspicion; she's all right, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked the other sharply.

"Unless we were able to prove that, at some time before the murder, she purchased from a chemist some two ounces of laudanum."

"What!"

"I am referring to the laudanum that was found in the nearly empty bottle of brandy that stood by Maurice Tarn's side, and from which he had been drinking all the evening," said the detective. "Good afternoon!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CURIOUSLY INEPT

ELSA heard him going down the passage, humming his aria, little dreaming of the onus which this officer of the law was attaching to her.

After the luncheon hour she was usually very busy, but the sinister man did not send for her, though he was still in his room. She had to take a file into the office that had been made her uncle's, and it was with a little twinge of pain that she knocked at the door and heard Feng Ho's soft voice bid her enter. She need have been under no apprehension, for nothing remained to remind her of Maurice Tarn. The office had been completely cleared; there was not an article of furniture, not so much as a hanging almanac, to remind her of the man who had passed in so mysterious, so dreadful a fashion. Instead, the carpet had been removed, the floor scrubbed, and in the center of the room was a square of grass matting.

Feng Ho sat crosslegged at a little table which was not more than a foot from the floor, and he seemed wholly inadequate, since the gilded cage occupied more than half of available writing space, and his ink and brushes took up most of the remainder. He had discarded some of his modern garments; she saw his coat and hat hanging up on a hook behind the door; and he wore, instead, a little black silk jacket.

"Good afternoon, Miss." He gave her his usual grin. "Pi has missed you excessively."

And, as though corroborating his master's statement, the little canary burst forth into a wild song, which ceased as suddenly as it began.

What made her ask the question, she did not know. Nothing was farther from her thoughts when she had come in. But these seemed days of impulse.

"Feng Ho, did you kill Mr. Tarn?" she asked and stood aghast at her own fatuity.

The little man was neither disconcerted nor hurt.

"Miss, I have not killed a gentleman for a very long time," he said, "not intentionally, with malice aforethought, according to law. Some time ago, yes. It was vitally essential to decapitate certain Chinamen who had been rude to my papa—cutting his throat with a sharp instrument."

"I really don't know why I asked you," she said. She could have cried with vexation at her own stupidity.

"It seems to me, if you will pardon me, Miss, curiously inept. For if I had decapitated or otherwise destroyed my aged predecessor, it is extremely improbable that I would make an official statement for the titillation of official ears. Even a bachelor of science is not so scientific as to tell the truth when same leads to intensive hanging by the neck."

Which was logical and true. Because she guessed that Feng Ho would tell the major, she seized the earliest opportunity of forestalling him by repeating the conversation to the major himself.

"You still think Feng Ho was with him when he died?" Amery asked when she had finished.

"I am sure."

"And yet you never told the police? It was only by the discovery of the hat that they were able to connect him with the crime, and, of course," he added as an afterthought, "the policeman saw him."



"And you saw him," she accused.

He raised his eyes and looked at her through half-closed eyelids.

"What makes you say that?" he asked.

"You were on the spot when the murder was committed. If it were Feng Ho I saw in the room, he would go straight to you. Of course you saw him!"

"Of course I saw him." His voice was almost mocking. "And yet, curiously enough, no policeman has connected my visit with Feng Ho. You ought to be at Scotland Yard. By the way," he said, "do you ever have toothache?"

She looked at him in wonder.

"Toothache, Major Amery? No—why?"

"I don't know. It occurred to me that you might suffer that way; most young people do. If you did, I have a much better medicine than laudanum, which is dangerous stuff to handle."

He saw her brows meet in a frown.

"I don't know what you're trying to say," she said.

"I know nothing about laudanum; I've never seen it. What do you mean?"

For the second time she saw the quick flash of his teeth in a smile.

"What a suspicious person you are, Miss Marlowe! I'm almost glad you're going," was all the explanation he offered.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### MIXED FEELINGS

ON the Saturday morning, when her pay envelope came, Elsa opened it with mingled feelings of relief and regret. Though the sinister man had reverted to his normal condition of taciturnity, he had been a little more bearable, and she found some new characteristic every day; something which, if it could not be admired, was so far out of the ordinary that it was interesting.

Without counting the money, she looked at the pay slip and found that she had received a substantial addition for her "overtime." Inconsistently, she wished he had not paid her this money; she would have preferred to give that extra piece of service, though why, she did not know.

At one o'clock, the hour at which she was to leave, she tidied her desk, emptied the drawers of her personal belongings, and at last, with a queer feeling of dismay, which had nothing to do with the fact that she was now out of employment, for Tarn's lawyer had hinted to her that the dead man had left her a substantial sum of money, upon which she might draw, she knocked at the door of Amery's room and went in.

He was pacing the floor slowly; he stopped and turned, as she entered, and raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Yes?"

"I'm going," she said.

"Yes, of course, it's Saturday. Thank you, Miss Marlowe. I will deal with the Nangpoo correspondence

on Monday morning. Will you remind me, when the Chinese mail comes in, that——”

Elsa smiled faintly. “I shall not be here to remind you, Major Amery,” she said.

He looked at her, puzzled.

“Why won’t you be here?”

“Because—well, I’m leaving to-day. You knew that.”

“Oh, of course!”

He had forgotten! And then:

“When is the adjourned inquest?”

“On Monday.”

He bit his lip, and she wondered whether that little pucker of brow had to do with her, or such inconvenience as the sudden death of Maurice Tarn had caused.

“You had better postpone your resignation till next Saturday,” he said, and for some absurd reason she could have thanked him. Her self-respect, however, called for a protest.

“I’ve arranged to go to-day,” she said, in a panic, lest he should agree to that course.

“And I’ve arranged for you to go next Saturday. I cannot be left at the mercy of a woman who spells India with a y. Thank you.”

With a nod, more gracious than usual, he sent her back to the outer office with mixed feelings. She agreed, as she returned her belongings to their places, that one week more or less did not count; that on the whole it would be more satisfactory to remain at Amery’s until the inquest was ended.

Although she was not to be called as a witness, she dreaded the renewal of the inquiry, but the adjourned proceedings lasted only two hours, at the end of which time a bored jury returned the usual verdict of “Murder against some person or persons unknown.”

Ralph she did not see in court, though he was there for half an hour, standing at the back of the public gallery; and she was back at the office in time to take in Major Amery's tea. Apparently he did not object to her overlooking the rapid immersion of the little slips in tea and milk.

"What has happened at the court to-day?" he asked, as she was going.

"The jury returned a verdict," she said.

He nodded.

"Major Amery," she asked, "do you think they will track the murderer?"

He looked up slowly. "There are about fifty-six murders committed in London every year. Twenty-eight of the murderers are captured and sent for trial; twenty-seven, decimal something, die by their own hands, and the other fraction escape the processes of the law. The odds are fifty-six multiplied by about three hundred that the murderer will be caught. By the way, did you see friend Hallam?"

"No, I haven't seen him," said Elsa, before she appreciated the impertinence of the question. "He telephoned me yesterday to ask me something."

He nodded.

"You didn't by any chance mention my little toothache jest?"

"Toothache? Oh, you mean the laudanum? Why, no, of course not. Why should I?"

He was looking down at his tea and did not look up. "I shouldn't if I were you. Are you staying on at the hotel?"

She shook her head. "No, it is much too expensive. I am staying with a friend for a week, and then I am finding a little flat. The police have given over Mr. Tarn's house to me, and I am going to-day to sort out

my belongings. After that the lawyers are putting the furniture in the hands of an auctioneer. I want to go early to-night, if you do not mind."

"Certainly, you can go at once. Does Hallam know you are making your farewell visit to Elgin Crescent?"

She frowned at him. This man asked the most offensive questions.

"Why should he be there? He is certainly a friend of ours, but I do not find Doctor Hallam so indispensable that I cannot do without him. Why do you so persistently speak about him, Major Amery?"

"He amuses me," said the other.

She had certainly never found Ralph very amusing.

The lawyer's clerk was waiting for her when she arrived at Elgin Crescent, and she was glad to have somebody else in that house of death. The place looked dirty and forlorn, and it was a most depressing task to gather her little belongings. Her search for a missing book took her into Tarn's study. This room had evidently been the object of a very thorough search, for the books had been removed from the shelves, tables and chairs had been set back against the wall, and the carpet was rolled up. She was glad. In its present state of disorder there was little to remind her of the home she had shared for so many years.

She filled one trunk and went to the lumber room in search of a big wooden case that was hers, and which, as a girl, used to accompany her on her annual holidays. It was really a series of boxes within a box, for its interior consisted of five wooden trays that fitted one on top of the other. With the assistance of the servant, who had come in to help, she carried the box back to her room, opened it, and took out the top three trays. The fourth, however, refused to budge.

"Don't worry about it, Emily," said Elsa. "There's

room enough in the top three for all I want to take away."

She finished her packing quickly, for it was growing dark, and she had no wish to be in the house after night had fallen. Her packing finished, she took a last look around, and then, with a feeling of thankfulness that she was leaving behind her so much that was mean and sordid and altogether unhappy, she went down stairs, handed the key to the lawyer's clerk, and submitted to the tearful farewells of the daily help, who, in virtue of the publicity which she had acquired, had assumed the style of an old family retainer. Elsa was very glad when the cab turned into Colville Gardens, and the drear thoroughfare was lost to sight, as she hoped, forever.

Leaving the largest and the least necessary of the boxes in the hotel store, she paid her bill and, with the remainder of her baggage, went on to Herbert Mansions. Her promised visit to Mrs. Trene Hallam could no longer be postponed, but she went in the spirit of one who had before her an experience both unpleasant and inevitable.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE VISITOR

For the sixth time Ralph Hallam opened the window and looked out. There was no cab in sight, and he returned to his armchair before the fireplace.

"It is many years since you waited for me like that, Ralph," said Mrs. Hallam, without resentment.

"I fail to remember that I ever waited," he snapped. "Don't get funny, Lou."

The woman laughed softly. "What is he like, the old boy?" she asked. "Am I supposed to be on my best behavior, or do I treat him as one of ourselves?"

"The 'old boy' is my banker, one of the leading men of the City of London, who will jump out of his skin at the first sound of anything raw."

Mrs. Hallam sighed heavily. "Whenever you fix a dinner party for me," she said in despair, "you always bring the dead ones! If this is the kind of life you live, Ralph, I wonder you don't grow old! Personally, I like a party that starts with cocktails and finishes with breakfast."

He made a little grimace of distaste.

"That's vulgar, I suppose," she said, watching him closely. "Put it down to my gutter training. You haven't mentioned the word gutter for a week. And here's your young and beautiful lady." She rose, as the distant tinkle of the bell came to her.

Until Elsa had been shown her quarters, a beautifully furnished bedroom and a tiny sitting room, she had no idea that Ralph was in the flat.

"I thought I'd come and see you installed," he said, as he shook hands.

She was not sorry he was there, for she felt a little ill at ease in the presence of his "sister-in-law."

"We have a very dear friend of ours coming to dinner to-night, and a friend of yours, too, I think," said Mrs. Hallam archly. "You know dear Mr. Tuckerwill?"

"Tupperwill," said Ralph loudly.

Elsa observed the slip and wondered how dear a friend he could be that she had forgotten his name.

"He isn't exactly a friend of mine. I've met him twice—poor man!"

"He's quite recovered," said Ralph.

Then, seeing that his wife was in the dark as to Tupperwill's injury, and that she was likely to betray the fact that she had never met him before in her life, he made some excuse and took her out of the room.

"Tupperwill was held up the other night by thugs. And remember his name, please," he said unpleasantly. "That girl is as sharp as needles. There was no need whatever for you to call him your dear friend; you've never met him."

"What is he coming for, anyway?"

"He is coming," said Ralph deliberately, "in order mainly to counteract any bad impression which you may make. I want this girl to feel a little more confidence in you than she does. At the moment she is nervous, and, unless she gets more comfortable, you'll find she has an urgent message calling her back to the hotel, and I don't want that. In the next few days I'm giving her an insight into my profession."

"Which is?"

"Never you mind what it is. She will be helpful. Now do you understand?"

Already Elsa was wishing she had not come, or that



the ordeal was over, for ordeal undoubtedly it was. She did not trust Mrs. Trene Hallam. Her sweetness was superficial and insincere. There was no disguising the hardness that lay beneath that all-too-ready and brilliant smile.

Mr. Tupperwill arrived a little later, just after she had changed for dinner and had returned to the drawing-room. He looked none the worse for his adventure and was, if anything, a little more talkative. The solemn eyes lightened at the sight of her, and he hurried across the room to offer a very warm, soft hand.

"This is indeed a delightful surprise," he said. "We meet in circumstances which are a little more favorable to polite conversation!"

"You know my sister-in-law," said Ralph, and Mrs. Hallam, who could recall previous acquaintances on the spur of the moment, was her gushing and vivacious best.

Nevertheless, as a social event, the dinner was an abject failure. Lou was bored to extinction; the girl's face wore a strained look, as her uneasiness increased; and the only person thoroughly satisfied with things, as he found them, was Mr. Tupperwill, who, having got onto his favorite topic, which was the derivations of the English language, was prepared to do all the talking, and he would have continued his discourse on philology until the end of the evening, if Ralph had not brought him back to a less gentle theme.

"No, the police have made no discovery," said Mr. Tupperwill, shaking his head mournfully. "I was rather annoyed that the police knew anything about it, and I can't understand how, unless Major Amery told them. I am sure you would not have taken that step, my dear Hallam."

"Of course I told them," said Ralph promptly. Mr.

Tupperwill looked pained. "It was my duty. I suppose Bickerson came to see you?"

"He has seen me twice," said Mr. Tupperwill. "An extremely pleasant man, but immensely inquisitive. By the way"—he dropped his voice and leaned over toward Ralph, and his tone became confidential and beyond the hearing of the rest of the company—"what you expected has happened. A certain person has closed his account!"

Ralph glanced significantly at the girl, and Mr. Tupperwill showed signs of momentary confusion.

"He has, has he? I thought he would. I would have bet on it!"

Mr. Tupperwill did not bet and said so.

"I would like to discuss the matter later," he added, with his eyes on Elsa Marlowe.

The opportunity came when Mrs. Hallam carried her away to see the photographs of her prize dogs.

"He has closed the account and taken away the box, you say?"

Tupperwill nodded. "This is the first and last time I shall ever be guilty of discussing the business of the bank, even with my best friend," he said soberly. "Without accepting your theory, which I dismissed rather hastily as preposterous, that Amery had anything whatever to do with my terrible experience, I am satisfied that a business man is on the safest side by keeping a quiet tongue."

He delivered this sentiment with the air of one who had made a great discovery, and he swayed back to observe the effect.

"Yes, he has closed the account without giving any explanation, and I can only assure you that I am very, very happy about it. You can have no conception of the state of mind I have been in for the past week or so, at the thought that Stebbing's held an account of a

man who, although to outward appearance is a respected member of society, may—I only say may—be connected, directly or indirectly, with an enterprise which, possibly inoffensive in itself, would be looked upon with disfavor by my directors.”

Having stated this reserved opinion, Mr. Tupperwill waved his hand, as though to dismiss the subject. The door opened, and Lou came in. Ralph Hallam saw by her face that something disturbing had happened.

“A man wishes to see you, Ralph. He says he would like to speak to you alone.”

“Who is it?”

“Mr. Bickerson.”

The two men exchanged glances. “Are you sure it is Doctor Hallam and not me?” asked Tupperwill.

“No, he wants to see Ralph. Perhaps, Mr. Tupperwill, you will come along and see my photographs?”

The fat man was apparently only too glad of an excuse to join the girl, on whom he had cast many furtive and admiring glances in the course of the meal, and in his haste he preceded his hostess from the room. A few seconds later Bickerson came in and closed the door behind him.

“Do you want to see me particularly? Has anything turned up?”

“Yes, something has turned up,” said Bickerson. His voice was cold, his manner a little distant. Uninvited, he took the chair that Tupperwill had vacated. “At the end of the garden in Elgin Crescent,” he said, “there is a line of railings running parallel with the sidewalk and a clump of laurel bushes, into which anybody passing along Ladbroke Grove might toss something and be pretty confident that it would never appear again. Unfortunately, the gardeners have been at work on trimming the bushes, and they found this.”

He took out of his pocket a small fluted bottle, with a red label, and put it on the table. Ralph gazed at it steadily and did not betray, by so much as a flicker of eyelid, his interest in this damning piece of evidence.

"When it was found, it contained about four drams of tincture of opium, which is the medical name for laudanum," Bickerson went on. "It was purchased at a chemist's in Piccadilly, the day before Tarn's death. The name in the poison book is yours, Hallam. Now I'm going to tell you something."

He shifted the chair round to face the other squarely.

"Part of the medical evidence at the inquest was suppressed at my request. It was that laudanum had been found in the body of old Tarn, and that the brandy bottle at his elbow was also heavily doped. You can take your time to explain, but I warn you that anything you may say may be taken down and used against you in a certain event."

"What event is that?" asked Hallam steadily.

"In the event of my charging you with Tarn's murder," was the reply.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### "PACE"

RALPH took up the bottle and examined it with an amused smile.

"Perfectly true," he said coolly. "I purchased this tincture of opium at Keppell's—on behalf of Tarn. As a matter of detail, I prescribed laudanum for him; he suffered from insomnia. The fact that the bottle was found in the bushes makes it look suspicious, eh? In the ash can it would have been damning, I suppose? And is that the new police theory, that Mr. Maurice Tarn died of opium poisoning? I seem to remember a small black-handled knife—had not that something to do with his lamented death?"

"Do you suggest that Tarn put the laudanum in his own brandy?" demanded Bickerson.

"I suggest nothing," said Ralph with a shrug. "It is not my business to make suggestions. For the moment I am rejecting certain innuendoes which connect me with Tarn's death."

He looked at the detective thoughtfully. "If it were my business, I should suggest how remarkable it was that you did not make any reference at the inquest to the telephone conversation you had with Mr. Tarn."

The detective's face flushed.

"That wasn't necessary," he said stiffly. "The telephone conversation which occurred in your presence involved the name of a third person. There was a whole

lot of evidence not produced at the inquest, Hallam. For example, I thought it wise not to refer to the fact that, two hours before Tarn's death, you were in the house——"

"With Miss Marlowe," interrupted Ralph.

"You were in the house and had ample opportunity for going to his room and doping the brandy he drank, and which you knew he would drink, having a good idea of his habits."

Ralph laughed.

"Then you suggest that Miss Marlowe was a party to my doping the brandy? I tell you she was in the house all the time, and I left her there. And why should I want to dope him?"

The detective did not answer this last question immediately. Instead:

"I have cross-examined Miss Marlowe very thoroughly, and I know that she left you on the study floor and went up to her room to pack. She intended spending the night with a relation of yours. She left you alone for ten minutes. And as to the other matter, I'm going to speak straight to you, Hallam. I have every reason to believe that you were associated with Tarn in his dope-running business. If that is so, and by some means you got to know that the old man had asked to see me at nine o'clock that night, there is a possibility that you may have suspected that he intended making a statement which would incriminate you. I'll tell you frankly that I do not believe the story that you procured this laudanum for Tarn at his request."

Ralph stiffened. He was alert now. The danger he had thought was past, had reappeared in its most alarming form.

"I don't like your tone, Bickerson," he said. "If you believe that I was running dope, or that I was in any

way connected with Tarn, or responsible, directly or indirectly, for his death, your course is a very simple one."

Bickerson's big face was expressionless, and Ralph saw that he was not prepared to accept the challenge.

"Maybe it is," said the detective, "but I am pretty certain just what I shall find if I go farther into this matter. The laudanum will be in your prescription book, under Tarn's name."

Suddenly he laughed and held out his hand.

"I'm afraid I've annoyed you, Doctor, but this murder has rather rattled me, and the dope gang has got me thoroughly at sea. In a few days I shall know much more about them than I know now."

He picked up the laudanum bottle from the table, looked at it with a little grimace, and put it in his pocket.

"I want to get just a little more information, and there will be sad hearts in dreamland!" he said cryptically as he turned to go.

Ralph showed him to the door, and the man stood outside for a while, cogitating, before, with a brusque "good night," he passed down the wide stairs into the street. As Doctor Hallam closed the door on him, the tension relaxed, and he sat down heavily upon a hall chair and wiped his streaming forehead.

What a fool he had been! It would have been a simple matter to have carried the bottle home and put it in the furnace; but a moment of overanxiety had led him to commit a folly which might well have proved his undoing. Bickerson was right in one respect—the prescription book in Half Moon Street would show the destination of that small bottle. Strangely enough, it had been an act of precaution, taken as an afterthought, and he blessed the inspiration which had led him to scrawl a bogus prescription in a volume which nowadays was very seldom used.

It was fully five minutes before he had composed himself and strolled into the drawing-room. Lou looked up with an anxious, inquiring glance, as he came in, but she could read nothing from his face. Elsa was playing at the piano, with the stout Mr. Tupperwill, one podgy finger on the leaf of the music, ready to turn the page at her nod.

"Anything wrong?" asked Mrs. Hallam in a low voice.

"Nothing," said Ralph. "He wanted to see me about Tarn."

He glanced at Tupperwill and smiled again. "Almost looks as if he's fallen," he said.

Mrs. Hallam nodded. "He's certainly got it bad," she said, and for some perverse reason Ralph Hallam was pleased at this development.

Yet he had no thought of influencing the banker when he had invited him to that informal dinner. His sole object had been to create a little confidence in the unquiet mind of the girl. Sensitive to her moods, he realized something of her uneasiness, and he had played Tupperwill for respectability.

"A beautiful piece, a very bee-au-tiful piece!" sighed Mr. Tupperwill, turning the last page reluctantly. "'Peace, perfect Peace!' It is the motto on which my house is run. It is the keynote of my life. My private safe opens to the combination '*Pace*'—a root word—er—um——" He saw Mrs. Hallam's eager eyes fixed on him and shifted uncomfortably. "Do you sing, Miss Marlowe?" he asked, turning to the girl.

Elsa laughed. "I sing behind locked doors," she said solemnly. "Which means that I realize my limitations."

Mr. Tupperwill sighed again. "It is a great pity." His eyes were full of undisguised admiration. "A very great pity. I can imagine you charming vast audiences,



or, shall I say, bringing ecstasy to the heart of an audience—of one! You have great gifts, Miss Marlowe."

Elsa laughed aloud. "It is very pleasant to hear that," she said dryly. "I will set your compliment against the many unflattering things I hear in the course of the day."

"Which means that Amery has the manners of a pig," said Ralph.

"Amery?" Mr. Tupperwill looked round with a start of surprise. "Surely you are not associated with Mr. Amery?"

"I work in his office, if that is an association," said the girl, a little nettled.

Why she should resent the oblique disparagement in Mr. Tupperwill's tone, she did not know exactly. But she did.

"It is a mistake to think that I hear many uncomplimentary things from Major Amery," she said; "and, if all the stories I hear from office girls are true, then it is a great advantage to have an employer who is neither soft-spoken nor too friendly!"

Mr. Tupperwill pulled at his lip. "That is true," he said, "that is very true. You will quite understand that I am not saying a word derogatory to Major Amery," he hastened to protest. "It would indeed be a most improper act on my part to detract from his merits. That indeed would be most unpardonable."

Elsa changed the subject somewhat hurriedly, and a few minutes later found herself being initiated into the mysteries of bridge.

At ten-thirty Mr. Tupperwill glanced at his watch and uttered a note of alarm.

"I fear I have overstayed my welcome," he said, "but I have had a most delightful evening, a perfectly delightful evening! I can never thank you enough for giving

me this opportunity of getting out of myself, my dear Hallam."

He looked from one to the other, his smooth brow bent.

"Would it be regarded as an impertinence if I invited you to dine with me to-morrow night—would that interfere very much with your arrangements?"

Elsa had no arrangements and no particular desires except, at the earliest possible moment, to find a small flat and bring her visit to the earliest possible conclusion. Ralph saved her the embarrassment of replying by a prompt acceptance of the invitation. He accompanied Mr. Tupperwill to his car, and when he returned the girl had gone, and Mrs. Hallam was sitting on the hearth rug, smoking a meditative cigarette before the fire.

"Who is he?" she asked, looking up.

"My banker. Where is Elsa?"

Mrs. Hallam jerked her head in the direction of Elsa's room.

"Am I supposed to go to this party of his to-morrow night?" she asked. "That old man is certainly the slowest thing that has happened since horse buses went out. And you're a fool to let her go, anyway, Ralph. The old boy is dippy about her."

"About Elsa?" Ralph chuckled. "Yes, I thought he seemed rather smitten."

"He's married, of course?" said Mrs. Hallam, blowing a ring of smoke at the fire.

"He isn't married, and that kind of man won't marry, either."

"Won't he?" said the woman sardonically. "Tupperwill is the kind of man that keeps himself single and solvent till he's sixty, and then he hands over his latch-key and principles to the first fluffy chorus girl who

tells him the story of her sad life. Look out for your Elsa, my boy. Is he rich?"

"Beyond the dreams of actresses," said Ralph cynically.

She gazed moodily into the fire and then:

"Are you rich, Ralph?"

He looked down at her quickly. "What do you mean?"

"That's not a particularly difficult question to answer, is it?" she asked impatiently. "Are you rich?"

"Not so rich as I shall be," said Ralph softly. "In a week's time I hope to be one million one hundred and seventy four thousand dollars richer than I am to-day."

That was the amount that had been penciled on the little memorandum he had found in Tarn's safe. And the money was somewhere. He had a shrewd idea that, given the opportunity for making a careful examination of Paul Amery's study, he would have no difficulty in locating the stolen property.

Mrs. Hallam made no comment, and they sat in silence until she threw the end of the cigarette into the fire.

"You're an optimist, both in love and finance," she said; "and I've an idea that it is going to be more trouble to get that girl than it is to get the money. What does 'pace' mean, Ralph?"

## CHAPTER XXX

### A LETTER TO KEEP

SHE slept more soundly than she had done in weeks, and Elsa felt almost reconciled to her stay when she was summoned to the pretty little dining room to eat a solitary breakfast. Mrs. Hallam had warned her that she did not rise before midday, and the girl was by no means sorry to have her own company for breakfast. The flats were service apartments—cleaners came when summoned, meals were procured from the kitchen in the basement, and Mrs. Hallam's one maid was quite sufficient to serve the needs of this economical lady.

Major Amery had not arrived at the office when Elsa took the cover off her typewriter, and he did not come in until nearly eleven o'clock. Ordinarily he went straight to his own room through the private door, but on this occasion he came through her office and, glancing up to bid him good morning, she thought he looked unusually tired and haggard.

"Morning," he said gruffly, before he disappeared into his room, slamming the door behind him.

A few minutes after, Feng Ho came in, greeting her with his typical grin.

"Has Major Amery arrived?" he asked, dropping his voice when she answered. "Nocturnal peregrinations produce morning tardiness," he added cryptically.

Something in his face attracted her attention.

"You look as if you've had nocturnal peregrinations yourself, Feng Ho," she said, for she noticed the deep lines under his eyes.

"As a bachelor of science I consume unlimited midnight oil," he said calmly, "first placing Pi in a condition of obfuscation."

"What on earth is that?" she asked, startled.

"In a dark room," said Feng Ho, "where the actinic rays cannot delude into a similitude of daylight and create singings when silence is desirable."

He looked anxiously at the door of Amery's room.

"Do you want to see the major?"

"No, Miss," he said hastily, "not until contemplation has eradicated suspicion of a fantastical imaginativeness."

She detected an uneasiness in his manner, which was unusual in this serene man, whose calm no circumstances had ever ruffled to her knowledge. She had noticed before that Feng Ho's agitation was invariably betrayed by his speech. In normal moments his English was unimpeachable; it was only when he was perturbed that he disdained simple language and expressed his thoughts in words of four syllables.

"Yes, I will see him," he said suddenly. "Grasping nettles firmly destroys virulence of poison stings."

And before she realized what he was doing, he had tapped at and opened the door, slipping through and closing it behind him. Listening, she heard Amery's sharp voice raised almost in anger. He was speaking in Chinese—she guessed this—and she heard the murmur of Feng Ho's reply. Presently the voices were lost in the clatter of her typewriter, for Elsa was not by nature curious, and, while she could wonder what the Chinaman had done to annoy her irascible employer, she was not especially anxious to know.

It was fully half an hour before Feng Ho came out, his face beaming, and, with a wriggling little bow, disappeared into his own den. The bell rang, and she took her book into the sanctum to find Major Amery

sitting on the fender seat, his chin on his breast, a dejected and dispirited-looking figure. He looked up sharply, as she entered, fixed her for a moment with his steely eyes, and then:

"I think you'd better stay on at Mrs. Hallam's," he said. "She's a kleptomaniac, but she won't steal anything from you."

"Major Amery!" she gasped.

"I want to say nothing against the woman," he continued, unmindful of her amazement and indignation. "She'll let you stay there as long as you want. If I were you, I'd get my traps and settle down for a week or two, at any rate. After that, nothing matters."

"I really don't understand you. Mrs. Trene Hallam has been very kind——"

He interrupted her with an impatient gesture. "Mrs. Hallam you can forget; she's just nothing. Ralph—I don't think you need worry about Ralph, either."

"Doctor Hallam is a great friend and a very old friend of mine," she said, with what, she felt, was a ludicrous attempt to stand on her dignity.

His tired eyes were searching her face.

"A very great friend? Of course—a very great friend. Still, you need not worry about Ralph." Then abruptly: "I want you to do something for me."

She waited, as he walked to the desk, took out a sheet of paper, and began to write rapidly. Seven, eight, nine lines of writing she counted, then he signed his name with a flourish, blotted the sheet, and enclosed it in an envelope, the flap of which he covered with a wafer seal. She saw him write a name on the envelope, and when he had blotted this he handed the letter to her. To her amazement it was addressed to "Dr. Ralph Hallam" and marked "Private."

"I want you to keep this letter. Have it where you can reach it at any hour of the day or night," he said, speaking rapidly. "Hallam may not be as bad as I think he is, but, if he is any better, I am a greatly mistaken man."

"What am I to do with the letter?" she asked blankly.

"Keep it to your hand," he said, with a touch of his old irritability. "If Hallam gets difficult, if any situation arises which you find impossible to handle, give him this letter."

"But, Major Amery, I really don't know what you're talking about. What situation can arise?" she said, holding the letter irresolutely, looking from him to the scrawled address.

"Tuck it away in your hand bag by day and under your pillow by night. If Hallam ever forgets what is due to you—let me put it clearly—if you are ever afraid of him, give him the letter."

She shook her head smilingly and held the envelope toward him.

"I shan't require this," she said. "I tell you, Doctor Hallam and I are very old friends. He was a friend of poor Mr. Tarn's."

"I asked you to do something for me," he interrupted her sharply, "and that is all I want you to do. I am not in the habit of asking favors, but I'll break my practice and ask this: keep the letter and use it if an emergency arises. Will you do this?"

She hesitated and then:

"I think it is very unnecessary and highly mysterious," she said, in spite of herself, "but if you wish me to do it, I will."

"Good," he said briskly. "Now we will initiate a businesslike correspondence with our American friends

of the Cleveland Police Department. I am anxious to know something about a gentleman who is at the moment in durance. Take this:

"To John L. Territet, Chief of Police, Cleveland, Ohio. Sir: Yesterday I cabled asking if you would kindly inform me whether the man Philip Moropoulos——"

She looked up in surprise.

"I thought I knew the name! He was a man arrested in connection with the drug traffic. I read it in the newspapers."

He nodded and went on:

"Whether the man Philip Moropoulos, now under arrest in your city, is known to have any English alias. For a special reason I am trying to identify him with a man named——"

There came a tap at the door. It was a girl clerk from the lower office, and she held a cablegram in her hand. Elsa took it and passed it across the table to Amery.

"Humph!" he said and tore it open. "That is a coincidence. You needn't bother about that letter."

Absent-mindedly he pushed the message across toward her, and she read:

Amery Company, London. Charge against Moropoulos fell through. Released and now on his way to England.

It was signed "Police Chief."

"Humph!" said Amery again. "Released, is he? That is bad news for somebody."

Elsa did not ask who that somebody was, and, indeed she was surprised that he had shown her such unusual confidence. Apparently he realized for the first time



that he had given her the cable to read, for he almost snatched it back.

"That will do," he said curtly. "I'll ring for you when I want you, which won't be for some time."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A CUSTOMER OF THE BANK

THE house of Mr. Tupperwill in Grosvenor Place was a model of what a banker's establishment should be. From garret to cellar it was a pattern of order, neatness, and quiet luxury. It was a house where everything went according to schedule, from six o'clock in the morning, when the housemaid kindled the kitchen fire and stoked the furnace, to eleven-thirty, when the butler carefully bolted the front door, locked the pantry, and turned out the last of the hall lights.

At any moment Mr. Tupperwill, by consulting a neat typewritten time-table, which was invariably kept in the top right-hand drawer of his table, could tell exactly what every servant was doing, the condition of every room, and the amount of petrol in the tanks of each of his motor cars. On Thursday afternoons at five o'clock Mr. Tupperwill received the exact time from the telephone exchange and, checking his watch to the second, made the round of the rooms and wound up and set his innumerable clocks. The collection of clocks was not the least pleasurable of Mr. Tupperwill's hobbies.

He breakfasted at eight-thirty every morning on two deviled kidneys, a crisp slice of bacon, three pieces of toast, and two cups of coffee. He never had more, and he never had less. When he had breakfasted, he glanced through three financial newspapers, folded ready at his elbow, and read the *Times'* financial article. At twenty-five minutes after nine, almost to the minute, he went

out into the hall, was helped on with his fur-lined coat, and usually the half hour was chiming, as he walked down the steps to his waiting car. Taking leave of him at the door, his butler was wont to remark that it was a cold day or a warm day, a wet day or a fine day, according to the meteorological conditions; and it was Mr. Tupperwill's practice to agree entirely with all that his butler said. It was the only point on which they met as man to man, all other items of news than the weather being communicated to Mr. Tupperwill by his valet.

On this particular morning, however, the banker broke his habits by ringing for the butler before he had finished his breakfast.

"Weeks, I am having a party to-night."

"Yes, sir," said Weeks, wondering which particular party was in Mr. Tupperwill's mind.

"There will be four to dinner, including myself. Arrange with one of the maids—a trustworthy maid—to look after the ladies. My bedroom may be used as a retiring room—yes, I think so," said Mr. Tupperwill thoughtfully. "And you will see that such things as ladies may require are placed on the dressing table—powder and that sort of thing. You will consult the housekeeper as to the color and quality, and purchase whatever receptacles are required."

"Yes, sir," said the wondering Mr. Weeks.

"The dinner had better be a little more elaborate than usual," the banker went on. "Soup—Julienne, I think; sole mornay; poulet *a la reine*; a *bombe glacé* and a savory; I think that will be excellent. A good champagne and a light German wine for the ladies—that also will be admirable."

"At what hour, sir?"

"At half past eight. Have a bridge table placed in the drawing-room."

He gave a few other minor instructions and went to the bank five minutes late.

Though by nature lethargic, he spent a very busy morning, for, like Major Amery, he opened and usually answered all letters addressed to himself, and seldom requisitioned the services of the anæmic young woman who acted as his secretary.

The business of Stebbing's Bank was, as has already been explained, a peculiar one. Many of the names of Stebbing's clients were unknown, even to the nearest and dearest of their possessors. Great merchants, and small merchants for the matter of that, professional men, and even the leading lights of other banks, found it extremely convenient to have an account which was not identifiable with their better known names.

Often it was the case that there was nothing discreditable in this desire for anonymity. A reluctance to let the right hand know what the left hand does, belongs to no class and to no age. Curious income-tax officials might see the books of Stebbing's and be baffled. Inquisitive busybodies, wondering who was behind certain theatrical productions, might discover the name of the gentleman who drew the checks that paid all the salaries, when the box office failed to supply the needful, and yet hardly guess that the plain "T. Smith" that appeared in the southeast corner of the check, disguised the identity of a merchant who would never be suspected of such frivolity.

Mr. Tupperwill was the repository of many secrets; and if his bank suffered any disadvantage from the possession of so many anonymous clients, it was that current accounts offered a conservative banker very few opportunities for building up big profits. Nevertheless, Tupperwill had his share of general banking business, his pickings of short time loans, his discounts, and the

other "makings" which add to a banker's revenue.

Usually he was so engrossed between the hours of a quarter to ten and half past one that he did not see visitors except upon the most urgent business. So that when his elderly accountant appeared in the doorway with a card in his hand, Mr. Tupperwill frowned and waved his hand in protest.

"Not now, my dear man, not now," he said reproachfully. "I really can't see anybody. Who is it?"

"The account that was closed yesterday," said the accountant.

Mr. Tupperwill sat bolt upright. "Amery?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes, sir. He said he wouldn't keep you more than ten minutes."

Mr. Tupperwill pushed back the table lamp by which he had been working—he was rather shortsighted—thrust some papers into a leather folder, and only then took the card and stared at it, as though he could read on its conventional surface some answer to the enigma which this call of Major Amery presented.

"Ask him to come in," he said in a hushed voice and put the Louis Quinze chair in its place.

Amery walked into the room and was received with just that amount of deference and distant courtesy which his position as an ex-client of the bank demanded.

"I have called because I felt that some explanation was due to you, Mr. Tupperwill. I closed my account with you yesterday."

Mr. Tupperwill nodded seriously. "It was reported to me," he said, "and I must confess that I was both surprised and relieved."

A faint smile played about the hard lips of the man from India.

"Your relief being due to the unsatisfactory char-

acter of the client rather than the nature of the account, which was a fairly heavy one?"

"It was a fairly heavy one," agreed Mr. Tupperwill, "but it was, if you will allow me the observation, mysterious."

"Are not all your accounts mysterious?" asked Amery coldly, to which the banker made no reply.

"I could not escape the feeling," he said, instead, "that you were using Stebbing's as a makeshift. I am sure you will forgive me if I am in error. But the impermanence of your account was one of its unsatisfactory features."

"It was intended to be permanent," said Amery coolly. "I will make a confession to you—that I opened my account with Stebbing's for a special purpose. I will be even more frank and tell you that it was my intention to engineer an irregularity which would have given me the right to go to the courts for an examination of your books."

Mr. Tupperwill gasped at this.

"I now know that such a course would have been futile. In fact, I knew less about banking than I thought."

"You wanted to examine my books?" said Mr. Tupperwill slowly, as the hideous nature of the plot began to penetrate. "I—I've never heard anything like it!"

"I don't suppose you have. But, you see, Mr. Tupperwill, you've lived a very sheltered life," said the other. "As I say, when I found that the scheme I had at the back of my mind was impracticable, and, moreover, discovered on the same day all that I wanted to know, I removed my account. Tupperwill, who is John Stillman?"

Paul Amery had a fatal facility for making people

jump. Mr. Tupperwill almost leaped from his chair at the words.

"Stillman?" he stammered. "I—I don't understand you."

"Nobody understands me, probably because I speak too plainly," said Amery. "You carry the account of a man named Stillman—a bigger account than mine and a much more dangerous one. Stebbing's Bank would survive having me on its list of clients, but Stillman's is one that will tumble you, your fortune and your bank, into mud so thick that it will choke you!"

For a second the banker stared at him in horror, and then he said:

"I refuse, I absolutely refuse to discuss the business of the bank," he said, bringing his hand down on the table with a crash. "It is disgraceful—unbusinesslike! How dare you, sir——"

Amery silenced him with a gesture.

"It may be all the things you say, but I tell you that Stillman, unless I am greatly mistaken in his identity, is more deadly than a snake."

"I refuse to discuss the matter," said Mr. Tupperwill furiously, as he pressed his bell. "You are talking about a lady, sir—a very charming lady, sir—a lady who, although she occupies an humble position in your office in the City, is nevertheless entitled to my respect, my admiration, and my homage, sir."

Amery looked at him aghast. "A lady?" he said incredulously. "In the City—in my office? Good Lord!"

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE SPECULATOR

JOHN STILLMAN, the mystery client of Stebbing's Bank, was Elsa Marlowe! The sinister man could only gaze, speechless, at the red-faced banker. Maurice Tarn's niece! Was she in it, after all?

"You are speaking of Miss Marlowe, I presume?"

"I am speaking of nobody, sir." Mr. Tupperwill was hoarse with anger. "You have asked me to betray a sacred confidence. I shall never forgive you."

The accountant was in the room now.

"Show Major Amery from these premises, and under *no* circumstances is he to be admitted again!"

Amery was still looking down at him.

"Either you have been grossly deceived and tricked, or else you're lying, Tupperwill," he said. "Miss Marlowe has no account with your bank, either in her own or anybody else's name."

"I decline, I absolutely decline, to speak another word. There is the door, sir."

The visitor was about to say something, but checked himself and, turning on his heel, walked out.

For a quarter of an hour Mr. Tupperwill sat simmering in his rage, and at the end of that time he had sufficiently recovered to ring for his accountant to come.

"Bring Mr. Stillman's account," he said sharply.

"I was going to speak to you about that, sir."

"Then don't!" snarled the ruffled banker. "Bring me the account."

A few minutes later a book was placed before him and



opened, and by this time he was something of his urbane self.

"You must forgive my—er—petulance, but Major Amery annoyed me; he annoyed me very much."

He looked at the page before him, and his face fell.

"He's not overdrawn," he said.

"No, sir, he's not overdrawn, but that is all one can say. His speculations have been colossal. Look at these." He ran his finger down a column of figures. "They're all brokers' checks. He has been dealing in Angora Oil. We carried a whole lot of the stock for him, but it fell from fifty-seven to thirteen in a week. I was going to ask you to see Mr. Stillman."

"Never seen him yourself?" asked the banker without looking up.

"No, sir; the account was opened with you, and I don't remember that the client has ever been to the bank. I always thought that the check signatures looked like a lady's."

"That will do, that will do, Thomas," said Mr. Tupperwill testily. "I will write to Mr. Stillman myself. So far as I can see, he has lost considerably over a quarter of a million this half year." He closed the book with a bang and waved it away.

A quarter of a million, he thought, with a sense of dismay, and thrown into the gutter!

To Mr. Tupperwill capital was a living thing, and that it could be treated cruelly, pained him. A quarter of a million mangled and tortured into nothingness! The thought was frightful. He reached for a sheet of paper and began a letter. Halfway through he read it over, with an expression of dissatisfaction, and, carrying it to the fireplace, lit a match and watched the paper burn into curling black ashes. He did no more work that day—he was too occupied with his thoughts.

Toward four o'clock he rang for his accountant.

"I am worried, terribly worried, about Stillman's account," he said. "The truth is—er—unless I have been grossly deceived, Stillman is a pseudonym for a young lady who was introduced to the bank some years ago, on the assurance that she had inherited a large sum of money."

"Indeed, sir?" said the accountant, whom nothing surprised. "A lady of title?"

"No, not a lady of title," said Mr. Tupperwill uncomfortably. "In fact, she holds quite a subordinate position in a London business house. I understand that she was fitting herself for a commercial career and starting, as it were, at the bottom of the ladder. I need not tell you that I deprecate the incursion of the gentler sex into the sordid struggle of commerce, but that is neither here nor there."

"What am I to do if further checks come in?" asked the accountant practically. "Mr. or Miss Stillman has only the barest balance."

Mr. Tupperwill looked up at the ceiling. "I think I should honor the checks," he said softly. "Yes, I think I should honor them—unless, of course, they are for a large sum—an excessive sum."

"I wanted to know, sir," said the accountant, "because I've just had a check in for twenty-five thousand pounds, drawn by Stillman, and there's less than fifty to meet it."

Mr. Tupperwill went very pale.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### STAYING ON

IF, obeying his bell, Elsa Marlowe had entered the room of the sinister man and found him standing on his head, she felt she would not have been surprised. He was guilty of such extraordinary behavior that she felt she was beyond amazement, and she was almost resigned even to his impertinent interest in her affairs.

Although several times she was on the point of destroying the letter which he had thrust upon her, she was checked on each occasion by a feeling that in doing so she would be acting disloyally to one who, she was quite certain, had no ill will toward her. That he might be using her for his own purposes, playing her off against Ralph Hallam, she thought was more than possible. But, since his self-revelation, her feelings had changed entirely toward her former friend. Even now she could not grasp the extent of Hallam's offense. Occasionally she had read in the newspapers stories of "dope fiends," but the practice had only an academic interest for her. She thought it was unpleasant, and that was all, for she had never been brought into contact with the victims of this vice, and her imagination was of that healthy type which did not dwell upon morbidities.

But, though she was ready to endure much, Major Amery's conduct that afternoon was especially trying. Nothing seemed to please him. He snapped and snarled like an angry dog, exploded violently and with the least excuse, and raged through the offices, like a devastating

wind, leaving elderly submanagers breathless and junior clerks dazed.

"He reminds me," said Miss Dame, in a tremble of wrath, "of one of those bullying head cowboys who go around making up to the boss' daughter, and who are always punching people or shooting them, till the handsome young fellow arrives that has had a row with his father who's a millionaire, and he comes in and throws a glass of rum in the head cowboy's face. From what I read in the papers, they've got more rum than they know what to do with over there."

"And what has he been doing to you?" asked Elsa good-humoredly.

"What hasn't he been doing?" asked the wrathful young lady. "A bullying, hectoring hound, that's what he is, a bullying, hectoring hound! I'd like my father to say a few words to him. My father would just look at him, and he'd curl up."

"I'm sure your father wouldn't curl up," said Elsa, willfully dense.

"I don't mean father, I mean that woman-worrying vampire! Which reminds me, Miss Marlowe—when are you coming home to have a cup of tea? You haven't seen our new house."

Here was an invitation which Elsa had most successfully evaded for a long time.

"Some day," she said vaguely.

"Of course, we're not your style," said Miss Dame, "but father's a perfect gentleman, and you wouldn't see a nicer houseful of furniture in the West End of London."

Elsa laughed. "I shan't come to see your furniture, Jessie. Honestly, I'll come just as soon as I can. This dreadful inquest——"

"I understand perfectly, my dear," said Miss Dame,

with a tragic look of melancholy. "I know just how you feel. I've seen Pearl Winsome that way often. And as to his nibs——"

A faint sound in the next room, which might have been the creak of a chair, or the tap of a paper knife against an inkstand, was sufficient to send Miss Dame into hasty retreat.

Elsa was dismissed that afternoon nearly an hour earlier than usual, and she was glad of the extra time, for she wanted to call at the hotel to get her trunks. She also had a little radio set, which she was anxious to set up in her new room. Between the hotel, where she recovered her belongings, and Herbert Mansions, it came to her that a few hours before she had not the slightest intention of remaining the guest of Mrs. Trene Hallam a day longer than was necessary. Yet here she was, with her box on top of a taxicab, en route to her home, content to extend her visit for an indefinite period! She did not ask herself the reason for this change of mind—only too well she knew. Major Paul Amery had settled the matter in two sentences. She was almost resigned to his tyrannical will.

Mrs. Hallam watched the erection of the wireless apparatus with more interest than enthusiasm, and she seemed relieved when the girl told her that she intended keeping the strange contraption in her bedroom.

"It looks dangerous to me," said Mrs. Hallam decisively. "All those wires and electricity and things. I should hate to have it around. How does it work?"

But here Elsa was in no better position than the average devotee of wireless.

"You're coming to stay?" asked Lou, as the girl was fixing the terminals. There was no great encouragement in her tone.

"You asked me to stay a month," said Elsa, a little uncomfortably.

"As long as you like, my dear." The lady's attempt to enthuse some warmth into the invitation was not wholly successful.

Deep down inside her, Mrs. Hallam was annoyed. She hated strangers, and she was by no means impressed with one of whom she thought as "Ralph's latest." That she was pretty, she was ready to confess, but it was not the kind of prettiness which Mrs. Hallam favored. In Elsa she found no spiritual affinity, though she did not exactly describe her failure in those words, even to herself.

"I suppose you'll spend a lot of your time listening to this thing?" she asked hopefully, and, when Elsa nodded, Mrs. Hallam took a kindlier interest in the apparatus. Elsa explained the character of the programs.

"Opera!" said Mrs. Hallam, making a little face. "Opera's all right, but the singing spoils it. I suppose you're looking forward to meeting old What's-his-name again?"

"Mr. Tupperwill?" smiled Elsa. "No, not very much."

"You don't like him?"

"I don't dislike him. He seems a very pleasant old man."

"You've made a hit with him, anyway," said the lady brusquely, "and he's got stacks of money. I suppose he's clever, but from my point of view he'd make the Dead Sea look like a soda fountain. I hate that kind of man who talks about the things you expect him to talk about."

"Then you must like Major Amery?" said Elsa.

A faint tinge of color came to Mrs. Hallam's face, and she shivered.

"When that man dies, I'll go into white," she said viciously.

So many people hated the sinister man, thought Elsa, as she finished her unpacking alone. The realization that "so many people" did not include herself came to her in the nature of a shock.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE GENTLEMAN FROM CLEVELAND

THERE was a conference at Scotland Yard, and outside that quaint "informants' door," where shabby men come creeping in the dusk of evening to tell stories to the hurt of those who have mistakenly given them their confidence, two officers were waiting to escort a man who had not yet arrived.

Sir James Boyd Fowler, chief commissioner of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, had in his office his superintendent and a detective inspector. The hour was short of five, and from time to time Mr. Bickerson looked up at the clock impatiently.

"They ought to be here in a few minutes now," said Superintendent Wille, following the direction of the other's eyes. "Do you expect this fellow to give you much information, Bickerson?"

"Yes, sir," said Bickerson. "He was in London three months before his arrest, and I have reason to believe that he was in very close touch with the amateurs and possibly with Soyoka's crowd."

"Will he squeal?" grunted Sir James. "That's the question—will he squeal? In four days I've had three letters from the Secretary of State, asking for an encouraging report. Up to date we've had nothing. You're satisfied that Amery is the pea?"

"I was never more sure of anything," replied Bickerson promptly.

Sir James growled something under his breath. He



was by nature an intolerant man, and his irascibility was considerably accentuated by the annoyance he was receiving from men higher up.

"Did Soyoka kill Tarn? Do you suggest Amery was in that?" he asked.

"I suggest that if Amery wasn't in it, he was behind it. Everything points to his being our man. His history is enough to damn him. Thrown out of the political service for trafficking in opium, he's either Soyoka, or, what is more likely, the real head of the amateurs."

"But you said Hallam was that?" interrupted the superintendent.

"I'm sure Hallam is in it up to his neck—equally sure of that; but if Major Paul Amery is the big boss, Hallam is in total ignorance of the fact. But that is the way these gangs are worked; there's always somebody right on top, pulling all the strings, directing most of the operations, financing every deal and clearing the proceeds; and there's somebody lower down, under the impression that he's the fellow that's doing it all. Amery is a trafficker in drugs, as slippery as an eel and as cunning as the devil."

"Did you have much trouble in getting Moropoulos over, sir?" asked the superintendent.

"None whatever. The case against him was too thin, and the district attorney decided not to go on with it. The Cleveland police were in cable communication with me, and I cabled for the man to be brought over. He's under escort of a Cleveland detective, by the way. I think he'll talk; from the description I've had of him, he seems that kind. And if he talks, I'm going to put these people where I want them. Here's your man."

A uniformed constable hurried across the room and laid a slip before the commissioner.

"That is he," he said. "Bring him in."

He returned escorting three men, one of whom was a Scotland Yard officer; the second, tall and lean-faced, was evidently the American detective, and the third of the party was a stout and rosy individual, who bore no sort of resemblance at all to a hardened criminal. He looked to be what he undoubtedly had been, the fairly prosperous proprietor of a small store; and, though he was a Greek, his voice showed no indication of foreign birth. He bowed genially to the chief and accepted the chair, which Bickerson pushed up for him, with a polite little murmur of protest.

"Yes, sir, I am Moropoulos. This gentleman is the chief?" He nodded to Sir James. "Yeh, I thought so. Now I'm going to tell you gentlemen, before we go any further, that there's no squeal coming from me. I've come to Europe because the chief at Cleveland advised me that if I could make myself useful to you, there was a chance of the police on our side dropping the case. Not that they had one, I guess, but that's a matter of opinion. The living I'll not talk about; the dead"—he emphasized the word—"why, I'm ready to say just as much about them as I think is decent. Now, captain, shoot!"

"By the dead, I suppose you mean Maurice Tarn?"

Moropoulos nodded. "Yes, sir, I mean Maurice Tarn. I don't know whether he was the big guy, but he was certainly one of them. I had dealings with him; I brought a whole lot of cocaine over from Germany in a specially made box. I guess you found it when you searched his lodgings. It had five wooden trays, one on top of the other—that's what you call them over here, isn't it—trays?"

"I didn't see that," said Bickerson thoughtfully.

"Maybe he burned it. I'm only just telling you that I

brought the box over for him, and I had a long talk with him before I left."

"Did he say anything to you about Soyoka's gang?"

A shadow passed over the pleasant face of the Greek.

"No, sir!" he said emphatically. "It was Soyoka who got me pinched. One of the bulls tipped me off. He said I was invading the territory of his man, which is a lie, for I was the only guy working the stuff on a big scale in Ohio."

"Did you get any hint who this man was?" asked Bickerson.

"He's somebody big in London. An officer—he's got a rank, I guess."

"You've never heard the name?" asked Sir James.

"It was'n't by any chance Major Amery?"

"Amery?" repeated the Greek slowly. "Well, I wouldn't just swear to it. All I know is that he was mad at me, and one of his people came along and squealed. Oh, yes," he added frankly, "I had the stuff all right! But they didn't catch me with it. That's where their case broke down. When they raided my parlor they didn't find anything more intoxicating than a bottle of tomato ketchup!"

"Did Tarn have any confederates? You must know that, Moropoulos?" asked Sir James.

"I made a pretty fair distinction between the living and the dead. If any of his friends have died, maybe you'll produce their death certificates, and I'll start talking. Otherwise——" he shrugged his shoulders.

The commissioner and Bickerson exchanged a few words in a low voice, and then the American detective was beckoned forward.

"You're not holding this man, officer, are you?"

"No, sir. So far as I am concerned, he is as free as the air; I've only come over as a sort of chaperon."

"It's true, then, what he says?" asked the commissioner in an undertone. "The case against him has been dropped?"

The officer from Cleveland nodded again.

"Yes, sir. He was just a little too quick for us. We thought we'd caught him with the stuff, but we came about five minutes too late."

It was Bickerson who took charge of the Greek, escorting him to the smartest restaurant within walking distance.

"No, sir," said the Greek, "it's never too early for dinner for a hungry man. That journey from Liverpool was certainly the hungriest thousand miles I've ever traveled. Two hundred, is it? It seemed longer."

"I've taken a room for you at one of our best hotels," said Bickerson, when they had found a table and a waiter. "And if you're short of money, you must let me know. We should like to make your stay in town as pleasant as possible."

Moropoulos shook his head, a gleam of reproach in his eyes.

"Listen, baby," he said gently, "they do that much better on our side. Say, they're artists! They'd deceive *me*! You haven't got into the way, I guess. It comes naturally awkward, trying to be my only friend in the great city. I'll pay for this lunch, Bill, just so I can have the satisfaction of telling you that you've heard all the squeal that's likely to pass my lips during my absence from home."

Bickerson laughed, though he was not in a laughing humor.

"There is nothing we want from you," he said untruthfully. "In fact, I don't know that you could add to our information. Hallam we know——"

"Who's Hallam?" asked the other in bland surprise. "He's half-brother to Stillman, I guess."

"Stillman!"

"Ah!"

The Greek was obviously tickled at the effect the word had produced. "I thought that would get you. A new one on you?"

"It's certainly a new one on me," said Bickerson, recovering from his surprise. "Who is Stillman?"

The Greek took some time to consider the question, and when he answered he sounded a very definite note.

"Stillman I don't know and have never seen. All I know I got from one of Soyoka's crowd that I used to run with in New York. Stillman is one of their top men, but I guess that isn't half his name. And now I'm through answering questions."

Bickerson was wise enough to drop the question of the dope gangs until the hungry man had finished his dinner. But neither the production of the choicest wine, nor the discovery of the most piquant liqueur, caused the Greek to grow any more loquacious. Bickerson escorted him to his hotel and then went on to call at Ralph Hallam's house.

As the detective put his hand on the bell, Ralph himself opened the door. He was in evening dress.

"Hello!" he said, a little wearily. "Have you come to see that prescription book?"

"Forget it," said Bickerson amiably. "No, Hallam, I've dropped in to make my final call, and then maybe you and I will never meet, except professionally, in a hundred years." And, seeing the look of doubt in the other's face, he roared with laughter.

"When I say professionally, I mean as doctor and patient," he said. "Can you give me a minute?"

"Come in," said Ralph, ungraciously, and led the way into his dining room.

"Now this is what I want to know from you: You have a pretty good idea of old man Tarn's possessions. Do you remember his having a box with five trays?"

"No," said Ralph promptly—too promptly.

The detective viewed him with suspicion. "Now listen, doctor, there's nothing against you, even if you were a friend of Tarn's, and he was a dope runner, as you know he was. Can't you help a fellow with a morsel of information?"

"If I knew I wouldn't tell you. What is wrong with the box?"

"Nothing—it had a false bottom, that's all. And I'm wondering whether the old man might have concealed something——"

He saw a sudden change come over Ralph Hallam's face; his eyes had grown bright with suppressed excitement.

"You're thinking of something pleasant?" said the keen detective, and Ralph nodded.

"Very pleasant!" he said.

He was thinking of a million dollars!

Suppose it were true? Suppose Tupperwill were mistaken? And suppose the money that he saw in Amery's box was really and rightfully the property of the sinister man? And suppose that, in his queer, secretive way, Tarn had taken the money back to the house and had hidden it? Elsa would know where the box was, he thought, as his car carried him toward Herbert Mansions. The balance of probability was that the money was in Amery's possession or at his bank; but there was just that chance, faint and barely possible, but possible. The very thought made him grow hot and cold.

Elsa was in her room when he arrived.

"That lady is certainly a bright companion for me," said his wife ironically. "She sits in her bedroom half the night, with those 'hello things' in her ears. What is going to happen now?"

"Nothing," said Ralph, "except that we dine with Tupperwill."

Mrs. Hallam groaned. "What morgue does he live at?" she asked. "Ralph, boy, I've given up two dances for you—real jazzy ones."

"Go and call the girl," said Ralph, whose patience in his wife's presence was never very far from the breaking point.

Elsa saved her hostess the trouble. She was walking down the passage when Mrs. Hallam emerged from the drawing-room, a dainty figure in the new gown she was wearing in honor of the occasion, though she thought it was very dreadful going out at all, and she said so.

"You're thinking of Tarn?" said Ralph slowly. "Well, he wasn't so close a relative that it need send you into mourning. You look tired," he added sympathetically. "Have you had a bad day with Amery?"

She shook her head. Mrs. Hallam had left them alone for a moment, and it was an opportunity not to be lost.

"I wonder if you remember, Elsa, whether your uncle had a trunk with a number of trays, fitting one on top of the other?"

She opened her eyes in surprise. "Yes, I remember it very well, because that particular box is in this house," she said.

For a second his heart leaped, and it required all his will power to hide the excitement under which he was laboring.

"I packed some of my clothes in it," she added, and his hopes fell.

"Empty, was it?" he asked carelessly.

"Why, yes, it was empty"—she hesitated—"at least the top trays were empty. One or two at the bottom I could not lift. I found to-night, when I was unpacking, that they are screwed to the side of the box, and it struck me that there must be something underneath, for the trunk is extraordinarily heavy, even when it is empty. Why do you ask?"

"There is no especial reason," he replied carelessly, "except that I took a fancy to the old case when I saw it, and your uncle told me that, if I wanted it, he would give it to me."

"You can have it," she smiled, "but you must find me another to take its place."

Then and there he would have canceled the dinner party and taken the box to Half Moon Street, but it was inadvisable to show so much eagerness, and, Mrs. Hallam returning at that moment, the subject dropped. A little later, just before they left the house, he found time to utter a warning.

"Don't attempt to unscrew the bottom trays," he said, in a voice low enough to evade his wife. "I have an idea there is something there which—well, frankly, should not be there."

"Do you mean drugs?" she said quickly.

He nodded.

Mrs. Hallam's impatient voice called them from the corridor.

"Are you coming?" she snapped, and the girl hurried to join her.

"This evening is going to be so entirely wasted," complained Mrs. Hallam, when they were in the car, "that I'd just as soon have chloroform right away!"



To Mr. Tupperwill, superintending the finishing touches of his little feast, the night was to be one of peculiar significance. He fussed from drawing room to dining room; he went up to his own apartment and solemnly surveyed the things which a knowing house-keeper had produced, and which ranged from lip sticks to cold cream; and while he felt that many of these acquisitions were unlikely to be of more service than a first-aid outfit, he had the satisfaction of knowing that nothing had been left undone for the entertainment and adornment of his guests.

A trim maid showed the two women into the room, and Mrs. Hallam inspected the appointments with an approving eye.

"There's a million pounds' worth of furniture here," she said enviously, surveying the rare Empire furnishings.

Her hand, sweeping over the silk-paneled wall in an effort to price the quality, stopped at the edge of a heavy golden picture frame, that hung, it seemed, a little low. Instantly she divined the reason, and, pushing the picture aside, she saw a circular disk of steel sunk in the wall. Was this the safe that Mr. Tupperwill had misguidedly spoken about? Those ineradicably predatory instincts of hers flamed into life. What was the word—something to do with "peace," and yet it wasn't peace. It was a word that meant running—*pace*!

In a mirror she caught a glimpse of Elsa, who was taking off her cloak and in the act of turning. With a quick movement Lou straightened the picture and walked back to the dressing table, her color heightened, her heart beating a little quicker.

"Look at all that truck," she drawled, indicating the serried rows of pots and dishes on the table. "The poor old fish!"

Elsa laughed softly. "Poor Mr. Tupperwill! He hasn't been used to entertaining women."

"That's a good sign, anyway," said Lou, and then: "I wonder if he's one of those eccentric millionaires that give dinner-party presents?"

*Pace!*—that was the word. She was sure of it now. She could hardly tear herself away, but the maid was waiting at the door, and there would be other opportunities. Such a man as Tupperwill would in all probability collect all manner of valuable trinkets; he seemed that sort of man. And one little piece would not be missed. Her passion for easy "findings" was beyond her power to combat. She went downstairs to meet the anxious Mr. Tupperwill, resolved to carry away at least one souvenir of a very dull evening.

And a dull evening it proved to be, for the banker was not in his most talkative mood, and he reverted to the subject of business and its cares so frequently that Elsa had hard work to conceal her yawns.

"I've had a very trying afternoon," said Mr. Tupperwill over the coffee, "an extremely anxious afternoon. In fact, I cannot remember an afternoon quite as full of unpleasantness. Clients can be very annoying."

"I always thought your clients were models in that respect," said Ralph.

He, too, had been silent throughout the meal, his mind so completely occupied by the possibilities that Elsa's old box contained, that he scarcely spoke half-a-dozen times.

"Yes, they are usually," admitted Mr. Tupperwill; "but this particular custome. I have in my mind has been very distressing."

Even he was glad when, at the end of a long-drawn-out rubber of bridge, in which Lou cheated shamelessly, the women rose to go upstairs to collect their cloaks.

"I'm afraid I've been extremely boring."

Ralph murmured something, as he strolled out to get his coat and hat from the melancholy butler.

"And I intended this party to be quite cheerful," said Mr. Tupperwill miserably. "But my usual vivacity entirely evaporated—entirely."

"I'm sure the ladies have enjoyed themselves," soothed Ralph.

"I hope they have," replied the host, in doubt. "I sincerely hope they have."

Elsa had got her cloak and was leaving the bedroom, when her companion stopped.

"Go down, dear. I won't be a moment." She was stooping over her shoe. "This wretched buckle has come undone."

"Can I help you?"

"No, don't wait," said the woman impatiently. Her hands were trembling with excitement.

Scarcely had the door closed upon Elsa Marlowe than Mrs. Hallam crossed the room, pushed aside the picture, and, with shaking fingers, turned the dial, her ears strained for the slightest sound from the corridor. She had a small combination safe of her own and knew its working, and in another second the door had swung open.

She caught a glimpse of a number of envelopes; there were two or three flat cases; but the only valuable thing in sight was something which looked like a gold cigarette case. She could not afford to wait for a closer search, and, slipping the case into her bag, she closed the safe, spun the dial, and, replacing the picture, was descending the stairs before Elsa had reached the bottom.

She saw Ralph's eyes fixed on her with a steady, inquiring, suspicious look. Hallam knew his wife only too well. But she met his eyes boldly and was gushing over her host before Ralph Hallam could decide in

his mind the inward meaning of her flushed cheeks.

Tupperwill escorted Elsa to the car; Ralph and the woman followed.

"You haven't been playing the fool, have you?" he asked under his breath.

"What do you mean?" she demanded in surprise.

"You didn't find any of Tupperwill's jewelry lying loose? If you ever try that with my friends——"

"You're mad," she said angrily. "Do you imagine I would do anything so foolish, so——"

At that moment they came within earshot of the other two and took their farewell.

"Are you going straight home?" asked Ralph, as the car started.

"Where else?" asked his wife. "Have you any suggestions?"

"Let us go to the Mispah. We'll have some supper and dancing and get the taste of this funereal evening out of our mouths."

He looked at Elsa, and the girl hesitated.

"We needn't go on the dance floor," he said, reading her unwillingness. "We can have supper upstairs on the balcony and watch the people." Reluctantly she agreed.

The Mispah, though the least advertised, is the most fashionable of the London dance clubs, and the floor was covered with dancers, when Hallam picked a way through the crowded balcony to the table he had reserved. The girl, to whom this night club life was a novelty, looked, fascinated, at the glittering throng that swayed and moved to and fro.

"This is what Jessie Dame would call life," she said with a smile. "Poor Jessie! Her one ambition is to mingle with a hectic throng, mainly composed of sinister men in evening dress, and meet the aristocracy on equal terms."

"A base ambition," said Ralph gayly. "There are not many of the aristocracy here, though there are a few. That is Letty Milenko, from the Gayety. That tall man is Lord Sterrer. The name of the scarecrow with whom he's dancing, I don't know."

Elsa was gazing speechless at Lord Sterrer's partner. She was a woman about middle height, painfully thin, and on whom clothes hung loosely. Her ears, her throat, her hair glittered with diamonds, and the big hands that lay upon the black coat of her partner flashed and scintillated dazzlingly. As the face came to view, Elsa saw that her eyes were half closed, and that she seemed to be moving in an ecstasy of perfect enjoyment.

It was the romantic Miss Dame!

## CHAPTER XXXV

### MAJOR AMERY IS SURPRISED

THERE was no doubt about it, no mistaking her. Jessie Dame, flashing with diamonds, expensively garbed, and dancing on the most exclusive public floor in London!

At first she was sure that she was mistaken. And then—no, it was Jessie! As the dance finished, the girl looked up, and Elsa drew back out of sight.

"Is she somebody you know?" asked Ralph, who had observed the effect this strange spectacle had upon her.

"Yes, I know her," said Elsa shortly. "Do you?"

Ralph shook his head. "I've seen her here once or twice before. She usually comes with a middle-aged man—there he is!"

He pointed to a corner whither Jessie was making her way, accompanied by her partner. The man to whom Ralph pointed was stout and bald, and to somewhat coarse features he added a sweeping cavalry mustache, suspiciously yellow.

Jessie! The discovery shocked her. She had never imagined that this gawk of a girl, with her foolish chatter of picture heroes and heroines, could lead what was tantamount to a double life. Elsa had always thought of her as, if not poor, at least one who lived in modest circumstances; yet here she was, carrying a small fortune in jewelry and obviously on terms of friendship with people whom Elsa did not imagine she could know.

She was being snobbish, she told herself. There was

no reason in the world why Jessie Dame should not dance at the Mispah Club; less reason that her doting father, of whom she so often spoke, should not cover her with jewels. At the same time she felt a strange uneasiness, and she could not keep her eyes from the girl, whose awkward gestures of animation were visible from where she sat.

Ralph saw that something unusual had happened, but he did not for the moment connect the girl's changed expression with that raw apparition on the floor below. He asked her to dance, and, when she declined, he was promptly claimed by Mrs. Hallam.

"Let me get a dance out of the night, at any rate," she said and carried him off, leaving the girl alone, not to her regret. The strain of the evening was beginning to tell on her.

She moved her seat so that, while free from observation herself, she had a good view of Jessie Dame. The band had struck up; the floor was again a kaleidoscopic tangle of colors and movement; but Miss Dame, now vigorously fanning herself, did not join the throng, and apparently her cavalier had left her.

Elsa took her gaze from the floor and surveyed the other occupants of the balcony, and then she uttered an exclamation of surprise. Between two pillars was a table at which sat a solitary and detached observer. He was looking at her, and, as their eyes met, he rose and came round the corner of the balcony toward her, an unusually gracious proceeding on his part; his interest in her presence was more unexpected than the actual discovery of Major Amery in this gay spot.

At first she thought he was going to pass her, but he stopped, and, sitting down in the chair recently occupied by Ralph, he looked across to where the long-plumed fan of Jessie Dame was working agitatedly.

"The skeleton at the feast," he said sardonically.

This piece of mordant humor was so typical of him, that she laughed.

"I don't often come to the Mispah," he said, "but if I had, and I'd seen that lady before, I should have been saved a very uncomfortable afternoon."

She hoped that others might also have been saved the discomfort of that hectic afternoon, but she took little notice of his remark, thinking that he was still jesting.

"All gay and girlish," he said. "How funny! Somehow I never imagined that lank woman in a setting like this."

"Why not, Major Amery?" she asked, ready to defend her friend and conscious that she was being something of a hypocrite, since she had experienced exactly the same sense of the incongruous, as he was now feeling. "Jessie works very hard, and she's as much entitled to a little recreation as I am. But probably it strikes you as being funny that I am here?"

He shook his head. "You have been dining with the massive Tupperwill," he said, "and the Hallams brought you on. Besides, you fit. The illuminations on that woman's ears were fascinating."

Every time Jessie turned her head, there was a flicker and flash of jewels. "And all on three pounds a week!" he murmured. "The thrift and economy of a poor working girl fill me with awe. That is Hallam and his wife, isn't it?"

He looked down to where Ralph was threading a difficult way across the crowded floor.

"That is Doctor Hallam and his sister-in-law," she said.

"His wife," he corrected, and, seeing her look of blank



astonishment: "You didn't know he was married? He hasn't told you?"

Elsa shook her head. "No, I didn't know," she said simply.

Her mind was in a turmoil. Why had Ralph kept the truth from her? What had he hoped to gain by his deception? As if reading her thoughts, the sinister man went on:

"I think it is a matter of convenience, and, for Hal-lam, of mental ease. His lady wife has one or two unpleasant hobbies. You haven't lost any small article of jewelry, have you?"

She shook her head, wondering. "Did you seriously mean what you said the other day—that she is a kleptomaniac?"

He nodded. "That is the scientific description. Personally, I should call her a sneak thief, with an itch for other people's property. You need not be shocked; some of our best people suffer from that complaint."

But married! She couldn't understand that. And yet she remembered wondering how it was she had never met his "sister-in-law" before. The reason was plain enough now.

For a second she felt uneasy, but then the humor of the situation came to her, and she laughed softly.

"She was the skeleton at his feast, then?" she asked.

Amery's eyes twinkled for a second and grew solemn again.

"Or he at hers. I'm not quite sure," he said. "That man with Miss Dame is her father. I suppose you know that? I didn't, until I took the trouble to inquire. You haven't seen him closely, I suppose? You should, but probably you're not interested in anthropology? Pale-blue eyes and a very large, fat, straight chin, which

usually marks a man with epileptic tendencies. The hair of the mustache extremely coarse—Mantegazza thinks that is a bad sign."

"Mantegazza?" she asked, bewildered.

"He is an Italian anthropologist—one of the few whose conclusions are worth study. The thickness of the mustache hair should be .015 of a millimeter. If it is coarser than that, the man is either a great criminal or a great scientist."

She listened, astounded, as he rattled on; and, remembering the uncomfortable moment she had had when he had told her her height and detected the accident she had once had to her little finger, she began to understand that he had been pursuing a hobby.

"You have made a study of these things, Major Amery?"

He nodded. "Yes, years ago, when I was in the Indian service, before I adopted the criminal career which is now exercising the minds of Scotland Yard, anthropology was an interest of mine."

She was looking at him intently. Not a muscle of his face twitched; there was no sign of embarrassment or of shame, when he confessed his guilt. And there was no boastfulness, either. He was simply stating a fact, and a fact beyond controversy. The music stopped, there was a clapping of hands, and he waited, his eyes fixed upon Ralph and his wife. Not until the music started again, and he saw the pair resume the interrupted dance, did he speak.

"Do you know the Dames?"

"I know Jessie," she said. "I've never met her father."

"Ever been to the house, I mean?"

She shook her head. "She's invited me to tea, but I've never gone."

"You should go," he nodded. "And I think I should go very soon, if I were you. It is rather a nice house, near Notting Hill Gate; a largish kind of establishment for people of their circumstances, with a fairly big garden, at the end of which is the garage."

"Have they a car?" she asked, open-eyed.

He shook his head. "I don't know. As a matter of fact, I have not been immensely interested, except that I've seen the house—in fact, I've seen the house of every person holding down a job at Amery & Amery's. The position of a girl who lives with her parents—or parent, for I understand Miss Dame has no mother—is always the more difficult to judge. Her father may be anything or nothing. By the way, you have a black box at home, haven't you, belonging to Tarn—a box with trays in it?"

He turned so abruptly to this subject that she was surprised into an admission. And then:

"How on earth did you know?" she demanded. "And what is the mystery of that box? You're the second person who has spoken——"

"Only two?" he asked quickly. "Are you sure only two people have asked you about that box? Myself and who?"

"Doctor Hallam. You think there is something in that box?" She looked at him gravely, and he nodded. "Drugs?"

"Yes, the drug that dopes the world," he said flippantly. "I shouldn't investigate too closely if I were you, but under no circumstances are you to let that box out of your possession. Here comes your amiable friend, and, by the expression on his face, I gather that he has recognized me."

"Won't you wait and meet him?"

He hesitated. "Yes, I think I will," he said.

A few moments later, Ralph came along the narrow balcony, a watchful, suspicious man.

"You know Major Amery," said Elsa.

He bowed slightly.

"And of course Mrs. Hallam you know?" said Ralph.

"Yes, I have met your wife."

Their eyes met in a challenge, and Ralph's were the first to be lowered.

So Elsa knew! Well, she had to know sooner or later, and he would rather she learned in the present circumstances than any other.

"I have identified the lady of the earrings," he said, as he sat down. "She's one of your girls."

"You mean Miss Dame? Yes, she is one of our minor lights."

"You must pay very big money, Major Amery," said Ralph dryly.

"Evidently," was the cold reply.

He got up with a little bow to the girl, and, without so much as noticing Lou Hallam, walked back to his place between the pillars.

"What did he have to say?" asked Ralph. And then: "So he told you my guilty secret?"

He tried to carry the matter off with a smile, but he went red under her questioning scrutiny.

"The fact is," he said awkwardly, "Lou and I have never quite hit it off, which was probably my fault. But we've always been good friends."

"Up to a point," broke in Mrs. Hallam. "He told you we were married, did he? That fellow ought to be running the gossip column of the *Megaphone*!"

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### A HOUSE IN DISORDER

AMERY sat over his third cup of coffee and a cigarette, watching the dancers, long after Elsa had passed, with a little nod and a smile, on her way home. He saw Miss Dame disappear finally, and the first series of lights go out, as a warning that the club was closing, and then he came down the marble stairs into Citron Street. It was raining, and the doorman, holding a huge umbrella, lifted his hand inquiringly.

"No, thank you," said Amery. "I'll walk."

He strolled across Leicester Square, through the midnight bustle of Piccadilly Circus, and made his leisurely way up Regent Street. He had not gone far before he was conscious that his movements were under observation. Glancing back, he saw two men, as leisurely as himself, walking in his rear, and he smiled quietly.

As he turned into Hanover Square, one of his pursuers quickened his step and passed him, and Amery swerved slightly to give him a wider berth. Hanover Square was a bleak desert; a crawling taxicab was the only sign of life.

He whistled, and the cab came toward him. The door was open, and he was stepping in, when a man came round the back of the taxi. It was impossible to see his face; his felt hat was pulled down over his eyes, a silk scarf covered his mouth.

"Good evening, Mr. Stillman!" said Amery pleasantly.

As he spoke, he gave the impression that he was wait-

ing to meet the advancing man. The words were hardly spoken before, with a quick turn, he had leaped into the cab, slammed the door behind him, and the muffled man faced the black cavity of a pistol muzzle.

"Stillman, I think," said Amery.

The action had been so quick that the man was taken off his guard.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, in a muffled voice. "I'm only telling you to get out and stay out!"

"That sounds familiar," said Amery coolly. "I seem to have used the identical term when addressing a partner, confederate or enemy of yours, one Maurice Tarn. You talk too much!"

The motionless figure on the pavement moved his hand slightly, but, dark as was the night, Amery detected the motion.

"Keep your hand down, my friend, or in a minute or two this cab will be carrying your lifeless remains to Middlesex Hospital; and the most brilliant house surgeon will not be able to restore animation. I should hate to put our friend the cabman to the inconvenience of mussing up his upholstery."

"Listen," said the man, hoarse with rage. "Life is pretty sweet to you, I guess? If it is, you'll get out of the game. I don't know who Stillman is, but you can't bluff me. I know who *you* are! There's a heap of correspondence in the bottom drawer of your desk that is exceedingly interesting to read."

*Bang!*

Amery had been leaning forward to the window, and he caught the glitter of a gun and flung himself back just in time. He felt the wind of the bullet, as it passed the bridge of his nose, and, before he could recover, the frightened driver had jerked the taxicab forward and

was going at full speed round the gardens of the square. Looking back, Amery caught a glimpse of a figure running across the road. On the whole he approved the driver's precipitation.

"I'm going to the nearest police station," quavered the taximan, when Amery leaned out of the window to give him instructions. "I don't care what you say. I'm taking you to the nearest police station! I'm not going to have that sort of thing happen in my cab!"

And then a hand came round the corner, and in it was a crisp, bright note. By the light of the lamp which illuminated the meter, the driver saw the magic word "Ten" and changed his mind.

"All right. Where do you want to go?" he growled.

The sinister man gave directions and leaned back in the cab. That was a narrow squeak. He must never take such a risk again.

Usually a light burned in the passage of his house, visible through the transom, but there was a complete darkness when he put the key in the lock and pushed the door wide open. No sound came to his ears, save the ticking of the clock on the stair landing. Feeling along the wall, he found the switch and illuminated the passage.

The first thing that struck him as curious was that the door leading to his study was open, and he had taken a step toward the room, when he heard the patter of feet behind him and turned quickly, to meet the grinning face of Feng Ho. The Chinaman was clad from head to foot in a shining oilskin.

"Inclemency of elements——" he began; and then he saw Amery's face, and he asked quickly in the Cantonese dialect: "What is wrong?"

"I don't know," replied Amery in the same tongue, "but I rather think somebody has been here in my absence."

The Chinaman ran past him into the open study and put on the lights. Amery heard a guttural exclamation of astonishment, and, following the man into the room, saw the cause.

The place was in hopeless confusion. Half the drawers of his desk lay on the floor; the cupboards had been wrenched open, the furniture moved, and a little pine-wood cupboard had been emptied by the simple process of tipping its contents on to the carpet.

"Where is Chang? Go and find him," said Amery quickly.

The Chinaman ran out of the room, and presently Amery heard his name called and went toward the voice. Feng Ho was kneeling on the floor by the side of a prostrate figure, so trussed and bound and gagged that he bore no resemblance to anything human. He was unconscious when the bonds were loosened, and the steel handcuffs unlocked.

"There's been no struggle here," said Amery, looking round the little pantry where the man had been found.

Feng Ho went to the mysterious region at the back of the house and came back with a basin of water.

"They came through the kitchen," he said. "The window is open."

Amery's European servants did not sleep on the premises; the last of these usually left at half past ten, and it must have been after that hour that the burglar made his entrance.

"They have taken my dossier," said Amery, after a careful examination of the strewn papers on the floor.

He pointed to a steel drawer; the lock had been torn bodily from its place, and where the drawer had been was a confusion of splintered wood.

It was curious that neither of the men suggested summoning the police. That idea did not seem to occur



to them, and when Feng Ho went back to attend the half-conscious Chinaman, and Amery took up the telephone, it was not a police number that he called.

"It must have been done half an hour ago," said the sinister man thoughtfully, after his telephone conversation had finished, and Feng Ho had returned. "Quick work!"

Again he took up the telephone; this time he gave a Mayfair number, and almost immediately Ralph Hallam's voice answered him.

"Is that Doctor Hallam?"

"Yes," was the reply. There was no mistaking the voice.

"So you're at home, are you?" said Amery with a smile, and, before the answer came, he had hung up the receiver.

"Quick work," he muttered. "Help me get this stuff together. Where have you left Chang?"

"I've put him on his bed. He is a little shaken, but not hurt," said Feng Ho, with that curious callousness which so shocks the Westerner. "Perhaps he will live."

Chang not only lived, but within an hour was a very voluble young man, invoking his familiar devils to the destruction of his enemies.

"I was asleep, *tao*," he said frankly, "and I knew nothing until my head was in a bag, and my hands tied."

"If you had been awake then, I think you would have been asleep now, Chang," said Amery cryptically.

He spent the rest of the night putting his papers in order, but the most important collection of documents had disappeared. He knew this before the search began. He had known it from the moment Stillman had spoken. To-morrow he must be early at the office. There were other things even as important as his dossier, and these must not be found.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE FOUR BROWN PACKETS

IN the middle of the night Elsa Marlowe woke up with a sense of deep trouble. She got up and put on the light, and, sitting down on the bed, carefully analyzed her mind to find the cause. Was it the discovery that Ralph Hallam was married? She dismissed that thought as being too absurd for consideration. Jessie Dame? It had certainly disturbed her to find Jessie at the Mispah Club, bejeweled and expensively frocked; but Amery had spoken the truth when he said that working girls were very difficult to place. They might come from homes where families were starving, and none would guess the tragedy behind their smart frocks and their amiability; or they might be the children of well-off people, immeasurably the social superiors of their employers. She had often heard Jessie Dame talk about her "pater," and Elsa had dismissed that little piece of pompous Latinity as sheer snobbishness. Possibly Jessie's excess of refinement was based on a feeling of superiority.

No, it was not Jessie. She was very well able to look after herself, romantic as she was, though Elsa determined that the long-deferred visit to the girl's ancestral home should be made that day, for she was curious to see what kind of home life the girl had.

Certainly it wasn't Jessie, and it was not Ralph. Then what had so depressed her. In a vague kind of way she felt it was Amery, his queerness, his loneliness,

and the sinister shadow that her suspicions had thrown over him. He was engaged, she knew, in a business that was both dangerous and unsavory. He had undoubtedly struck down a comfortable middle-aged banker, for no other offense than that he had talked too much. Cold-blooded, cynical, remorseless, ruthless—and very lonely—that was Amery.

She caught her breath in horror at herself. She had once heard of a man whose formula for winning the love of women was to "treat 'em rough and keep 'em going!" Was she being subjected to this process, and was this the result?

She was wide awake now. Her sense of unhappiness had been swallowed up in the alarm of her discovery. Looking at the clock, she saw that it was four. And then her eyes fell upon the battered box which had so exercised the interest of Ralph and the man. She pulled open the lid, took out the three top trays, and tried again to move the fourth, but it was screwed tightly, if clumsily, and defied her efforts. Lifting one end of the box, she felt its weight. There was something beneath that fastened tray.

It was five o'clock when she went back to bed, but not to sleep. She was dressed and had cooked her breakfast before Mrs. Hallam's daily maid had put in her appearance. Even now she did not feel the least bit sleepy. A night of rain and storm had been succeeded by a bright spring morning, which stirred something in her heart that was akin to happiness.

"You're early, miss," said the maid, with that touch of resentment which domestics invariably show toward the early riser.

"I'm going to the office early," said Elsa, feeling that some excuse was necessary and not wishing to have the story of her sleeplessness carried to Mrs. Hallam.

It was like Elsa that having, on the spur of the moment, invented an intention of going early, she should find herself, soon after eight, walking up Wood Street and wondering whether the office would be open.

It was not only open, but apparently there were other early callers. She saw two men talking in the doorway, and she recognized one as Bickerson. There was no mistaking his well-set figure. His head was turned, as she came into view, and he was walking slowly up the street, in earnest consultation with his companion. Before he had turned she was in the passage and mounting the stairs.

The cleaners had left her room, and she was apparently the only member of the staff on the premises. Fortunately there was plenty of work to occupy her, and she went into Amery's cold office to collect a card index of addresses that she had promised herself to put in order.

Placing the little box on his desk, her nimble fingers passed quickly over their edges, withdrawing one here, replacing another there, for, neat in other respects, he was the most careless of men, and more often than not it was necessary to search the floor for addresses he had removed and forgotten to return.

The door was ajar; she could hear distinctly the sound of feet on the stairs, and she wondered what other member of the staff came so early. And then she heard Bickerson's voice. as two men came into her office. She raised her head and listened.

"He will be here at nine. I would rather the search was conducted in his presence," said the voice of the stranger, and by the respectful tone in which Bickerson answered, it was evident that he was the detective's superior in rank.

"Just as you like, sir. I've not put the warrant into

effect before, but the information which came to me early this morning leaves no doubt that the stuff is on the premises. There's a cupboard by the side of the fireplace which I noticed when I called last time."

Elsa listened, breathless. Looking round, she saw the long, narrow cupboard and remembered that it was one she had not seen the major use. What was the "stuff?" Should she go out to meet and warn him? That might help, but it could hardly prevent the discovery of the incriminating material, whatever it was, that was behind the small door.

Somebody took a step toward the room.

"I'll show you where," said Bickerson.

She looked round, and in a second she had passed through the doorway into the little cupboardlike apartment which served Amery as a wash place and dressing room. She was just in time.

"There it is," she heard Bickerson say, "on the right of the fireplace. Most of these old-fashioned offices have cupboards in that position. I don't see why we shouldn't open it now, sir."

"Wait till he comes," said the other gruffly, and then the sound of their voices receded.

She came back to Amery's room. They had closed the door behind them when they went out; the key was in the lock, and, without counting the consequences, she turned it and flew back to the cupboard by the mantelpiece. This was locked and defied her efforts to open it. In desperation she took up the poker from the fireplace and, with a strength which surprised her, smashed in the panel. The sound must have reached the ears of the men outside, for they came back, and one of them tried the door.

"Who is there?" he called.

She made no answer. Again the poker fell upon the

door, and now the panel was so broken that she could see inside.

On a shelf lay four little packets, each about three inches square, and each wrapped in brown paper and fastened with sealed string. She put in her trembling hand and took out the first. The label was partly in German and partly in English, but she needed no knowledge of German to realize that the package contained cocaine.

What should she do? The firegate was empty. Then she remembered the washbowl.

Somebody was hammering on the door.

"Who is in there?"

With her teeth set, she ignored all except the pressing problem of Amery's danger. Tearing off the paper cover, she let drop into the basin a heap of glittering white powder. Turning on both taps, she emptied the second and then the others, and, without waiting to watch the deadly drug flow to waste, she came back to Amery's room, found his matches, and, striking a light, burned the wrappers, watching them turn to black ash. When she returned to the washbowl, every vestige of the cocaine had disappeared, and then, and not until then, did she walk calmly to the door, turn the key, and open it. A red-faced, angry Bickerson confronted her, behind him an older man, taller and white-haired.

"What have you been doing?" demanded Bickerson roughly. "Why didn't you open the door when I called you?"

"Because I do not recognize your right to give me instructions," she said.

One glance he gave at the smashed cupboard door.

"I see! So you're working with Amery, are you, young lady? It's as well to know that. I suppose you know you're liable to a severe penalty?"

"For what crime?" she asked, with a calm she did not feel. "Looking after my employer's interests?"

"What did you find in there?"

"Nothing."

He saw the charred paper in the fireplace.

"Nothing, eh?" he said between his teeth.

He heard the sound of running water, looked into the dressing room, and understood.

"What did you find?" he asked again. "Come, Miss Marlowe, I'm sure you do not wish to connive in the breaking of the law. What was in that cupboard?"

"Nothing," said Elsa doggedly.

She was very white; her knees felt as if at any moment they would give way under her; but she stood up square to the police officer, defiance in the tilt of her chin and in her fine eyes.

"You didn't know she was in that room when you spoke," said the older man with a little chuckle. "Young lady, you've taught a very able detective inspector a lesson which I hope he will not forget!"

Bickerson was now conducting a thorough search of the office. The cupboard on the left of the fireplace was unlocked, but empty. He tried the drawers of Amery's desk; they all opened save one, and, as he pulled a bunch of keys from his pocket and knelt to open this, the man most concerned in the search walked into the room.

"Looking for something?" he asked politely.

"I have a warrant to search your office," said Bickerson, trembling with anger.

"I doubt it," replied Amery coolly. "Since when has Scotland Yard had the right of searching a City office? I am under the impression that there is an admirable force of police operating in the one square mile of territory known as the City of London; and, unless I am mistaken, these gentlemen are extremely jealous of their

authority being taken from their hands. May I see your warrant?"

He took the paper from the man's hand and read it.

"This is an authorization to search my house in Brook Street, not this office," he said, "and I'm rather surprised that Superintendent Wille connived at this irregularity."

The bigger man started.

"I understood that the necessary permission from the City commissioner had been obtained," he said stiffly. "You told me this, Bickerson."

"The City detective is downstairs," growled the other. "If Major Amery is so particular as to form, we'd better have him up."

When the third detective arrived, Elsa recognized him as the man she had seen in consultation with Bickerson. He produced the document and seemed a little piqued to find that the search had already begun. For, while there is perfect friendship between the police of the guarded City and Scotland Yard, there is, as Major Amery very truly said, a very jealous objection to the Yard men operating east of Temple Bar or west of Aldgate Pump.

"There's nothing to be found here," said Bickerson, after Amery had opened the locked drawer, and the City man had made his search. "But it *was* here!" He pointed to the smashed cupboard. This had been the first object on which Amery's eyes had fallen when he entered the room. "There was something there, and this girl had taken it out and destroyed it. I think you will be sorry for this, Miss Marlowe."

"If she is," said Amery coldly, "I will phone you."

He did not speak again until the men had left the building, then he turned and surveyed the girl with a new



interest. And from her his eyes strayed to the wrecked cupboard.

"You did that, of course?"

She nodded.

"What did you find?"

"Oh, Major Amery, why do you pretend?" she burst forth. "You know what I found! Four packets of that awful stuff!"

"Opium?"

"I don't know what it was; I think it was cocaine. It was white and glistening."

He nodded.

"That was cocaine. Four packets?" He whistled softly. "And you washed them away, did you?"

"Yes," she said shortly and was preparing to go back to her work.

"That was very good of you." His politeness was almost mechanical. "Very good of you, indeed! Four packets of cocaine. German, by any chance?"

"Oh, of course they were German!" she said impatiently. "You know——"

He shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "I have never had a greater surprise than to learn that there were drugs in this office."

He walked to his desk, gave a little jerk to the edge, and, to her astonishment, the whole of the top slid back, revealing a shallow cavity in which lay a small, thin package of papers. These he took out, put them in his inside pocket, pulled the top of the desk back in its place, and smiled.

"Did Mr. Bickerson, in the course of any unguarded conversation, reveal how he came to know that the cocaine was in my office?"

"No; he said he knew early this morning."

"I see," said the other softly. "Now I wonder how our friend put them there?"

"Our friend—which friend?"

"A gentleman named Stillman," he said carelessly, "who came in before office hours and planted the drugs in my office."

"But—but," she stammered, "aren't you a dealer in drugs?"

He smiled.

"I have never bought anything more deadly than chewing gum in my life," he said.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE CORRECTED LETTER

ELSA could only gaze at him blankly. "But you are Soyoka! I know—you have admitted that you are!"

His face was expressionless.

"Be that as it may," he said, "I have never bought or sold drugs of any kind, with the exception, perhaps, of the interesting commodity of which I spoke."

She drew a long breath. "I can't understand it."

"Don't try," he said.

He walked across to the smashed cupboard.

"Poker?" he asked. "Of course it was the poker. Now just tell me how you came to do it."

In a few words she explained how she had come early, had seen the detectives waiting in the street, and overheard Bickerson and his superintendent talking, and all that followed.

"How very wonderful!" he said, looking at her strangely. "You remarkable girl!"

She colored under his eyes, felt absurdly tearful, for the reaction had come, and she wanted to get away, sit down and recover her moral breath. He must have seen this, for his old manner returned.

"Ask Feng Ho to come to me, will you, please?"

She went out and found Feng Ho tickling the canary with the end of a long-handled paint brush, and the Chinaman was inclined to linger, until she said:

"Feng Ho, something has happened in Major Amery's office. He wants you at once."

And then Feng Ho moved with some celerity.

It was only a quarter of nine, she saw, when she looked at the office clock, and she was glad for this little respite before the real business of the day commenced. She was feeling weak and shaken, and she would have given anything to have got away from the office for an hour.

An interest in life came with the arrival of Miss Dame, and, observing the fiery hair and the red button of a nose, Elsa wondered if this plainly dressed and unattractive female could have been the resplendent being she had seen on the previous night. The fatigue attendant upon the gay life left no visible evidence, for Miss Dame was as voluble as ever.

"My dear," she said, "who do you think I met downstairs? That Mr. Dickerson, the famous sleuth!"

"Bickerson?"

"Bicker or Dicker, it's all the same to me. Such a nice man! The way he lifted his hat shows that he was meant for something better than a detective. And yet I've known a few good detectives in my time, perfect gentlemen, but secret-service agents, if you understand? When the plans are stolen—you know what I mean, government plans about war, where the forts are going to be built and that sort of thing—they get them back. They're younger than Mr. Bickerson, though," she added, as though regretting the lost opportunities for romance which the stolid Bickerson might otherwise have offered.

"Jessie, how long have you been a member of the Mispah Club?"

Miss Dame dropped the papers she was carrying and hid her confusion in gathering them together.

"My dear, how you startled me! How did you know I was a member of the Mispah?" she asked, a little self-

consciously. "Of course, there's no reason why I shouldn't be. A young girl like me wants to see a little bit of life. But I'm not, as a matter of fact. Pater is a member. Why—did you see me?"

Elsa nodded.

"Yes, I saw you," she said quietly, and Miss Dame tossed her head.

"Well, there's nothing in it, is there?" she asked defiantly. "I mean, a young girl has to live. She can't be a foggy or a stick in the mud. It's quite time enough to settle down when you're older. And if the Pater takes me out, well, that's nobody's business. Not that I'm saying you're poking your nose into my affairs, because I'm not. Did you like the dress?" inconsequently. "Of course, the jewels—I borrowed those; they're not real. Yes, they are—they are real, but I——"

She was incoherent, torn between a pride of possession and a fear of the impression she might be creating.

"I don't want you to think that I'm not a good girl, Miss Marlowe," she said, with an almost comical attempt at the virtuous. "But my pater is rather well off. I've never told anybody, because they might think it funny that I'm working here for a mere pittance, so to speak. I needn't work at all."

"I wonder you do, Jessie."

Miss Dame was apparently also wondering at her condescension, for she did not answer, and, though she opened her lips twice to speak, it was not until the third effort that she offered an explanation which was, on the whole, unconvincing.

"Pater likes me to have something to occupy my time. 'Satan finds work for idle hands,' as the Good Book says. Pater's rich."

"That's what Major Amery thought," said Elsa, and Miss Dame's jaw dropped. "Amery?" she squeaked,

her face going pale. "My word! He didn't see me? Was he there?"

Elsa nodded.

"At the Mispah—that misery at the Mispah! What did he say, Miss Marlowe? I suppose he thought it was funny?"

"He did—rather," said Elsa, speaking nothing but the truth.

But it was not the girl's idea of funniness that she was thinking about.

"I'll bet he did!" said Jessie in a hushed voice, her eyes gleaming redly through her spectacles. "I suppose he's got all sorts of low ideas about me. Did he see Pater?"

"Yes, he saw your father."

"Oh!" said Miss Dame blankly. And then, after a long cogitation: "It can't be helped. He didn't ask to see me this morning?"

"No, he doesn't seem to be the slightest bit interested in you this morning," said Elsa with a smile, "but that doesn't mean——"

"I know it doesn't mean anything," interrupted Miss Dame. "He's one of those fly, underhand people who are always on the lookout for trouble, and, before you know where you are, bingo!"

She thought again, and again said that it couldn't be helped.

"I bought it in Shaftesbury Avenue—the dress, I mean—fourteen guineas. It was a lot of money, but you can't get classy robes cheaper than that. Pater collects diamonds; he's in the—in the trade—in the diamond trade, I mean—as a hobby."

She seemed anxious to discover the effect she had produced upon the girl, but more especially upon Major Amery.

"If he saw me with my pater, he would know it was all right, wouldn't he? I mean, he'd know I wasn't one of these fast girls that go round luring men to their ruin?"

Elsa did not laugh, though she was strongly tempted.

"I don't think I should worry what Major Amery thinks," she said soothingly; "and, unless he mentions the matter to you, I should not speak about it."

"H'm!" said Miss Dame dubiously.

She made no further appearance that morning, and Elsa was not sorry, for Amery was in a mood of indecision. Usually his letters to his foreign correspondents needed little or no revision. As they were dictated, so were they signed; except on very rare occasions, when he would scrap a letter and begin anew. This morning he dictated a long epistle, and she was halfway through its transcription when he came into her room.

"You needn't bother about that letter," he said. "Bring your book, and I will give you another one."

And then the same thing happened again. She was almost on the last sentence of the second literary effort when he appeared.

"I don't quite like the wording of that letter. Will you come in, and we'll try afresh?" he said.

It was a letter to a Chinese merchant in Shanghai, and dealt, not with shipments of merchandise, but with a mysterious individual to whom he referred as "F. O. I." F. O. I. wasn't quite satisfied with the way things were going. And F. O. I. thought that a little more energy might be displayed at the Chinese end. At the same time, F. O. I. recognized all the difficulties and was deeply appreciative of all Mr. T'Chang Fui Zen was doing. F. O. I. was also worried about a man called Stillman, "though," said the letter, "I have been able to locate this gentleman, and I hope at an early date to

counteract his operations to our advantage." This passage occurred in all three letters, and seemed to be the main theme, though there were endless details which varied in description with each new attempt he made to produce the perfect communication.

"I suppose you get rather bored with typing the same letter over and over again?" he said, as he put his signature to the last of the epistles she had brought in.

She smiled. "No; it doesn't often happen, and I'm getting quite used to your ways now, Major Amery. Soon, I think I shall understand you!"

"And you're leaving on Saturday, too," he mused. Then, catching her eye, he laughed, as though he were enjoying some secret jest of his.

He followed her into her room and took a quick glance round.

"Why, of course!" he said. "Though that doesn't explain everything."

She looked up at him.

"Explain everything?" she repeated.

"I was thinking of another matter," he said hurriedly.

Just before lunch, in his abrupt way, he asked her a question, which, like so many of his interjections, was altogether unexpected.

"Where are you going to-night?" he asked.

"To-night? Nowhere."

She could never lose the habit of surprise at the strange butterfly movements of the sinister man's mind.

"Are you sure?"

"Why, of course I'm sure, Major. I am more especially sure because 'Faust' is being broadcast from the opera house, and I love the music."

For the first time she saw the man startled.

"'Faust?' How strange, how very odd!"

"I see nothing very odd in it," she laughed. "I am



one of those wireless enthusiasts who love opera. I wouldn't miss a note or a word for anything!"

"How very odd!" he said again. "'Faust!'"

The oddness did not seem particularly obvious to Elsa, but she knew her man too well to pursue the subject; and, as she might have expected, when he spoke again it was of something that had not the slightest relation to opera or broadcasting.

"Don't forget what I told you about your box," he said, and, before she could answer, he had gone back to his room, closed the door behind him, and she heard the click of the lock, as the key turned.

Elsa frowned. Was he quite—— Men who have lived for many years in hot climates, particularly the climate of India, were strange. She had known an old Indian general who invariably started dinner with a sweet and finished with soup. She couldn't imagine the sinister man doing anything so eccentric, she thought whimsically. But he was—queer.

The luncheon interval gave her an opportunity of going back to Mrs. Hallam's flat for a prosaic purpose—to replace a laddered stocking. Mrs. Hallam had given her a key, and she went in, believing she would have the flat to herself, for the lady had told her she was going out to lunch. She walked down the narrow corridor, turned the handle of her door, walked in, and then stopped dead, with a gasp of amazement and annoyance.

The black trunk was in the middle of the floor and opened. By its side Ralph Hallam knelt in his shirt sleeves, a screw driver in his hand, and he was busily unscrewing the top tray.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### RALPH EXPLAINS

HE looked up with a start and went very red.

"Hullo, old girl!" Ralph spoke with an uneasy attempt at carelessness. "I thought I'd come and solve the mystery of your box."

"I didn't think there was any mystery about it, Ralph," she said coldly; "and, at any rate, I don't know why you want the thrill all to yourself."

He got up, dusting the knees of his trousers, and put on his coat.

"The truth is, Elsa, I wanted to save you from what might have been a very embarrassing discovery," he said. "I will say nothing against Maurice Tarn, but I rather think there is something hidden here which would shock you to see."

Elsa's quiet smile he did not like. "I'm proof against shock, Ralph," she said.

He had lifted the first of the loose trays to replace it, when she stopped him.

"Continue the good work. Don't deny me my flash of excitement. One screw is out, and there are only three others."

"You mean you want it opened?" he said uncomfortably. "I should wait if I were you, Elsa. Give me a few minutes alone to let me be sure there is nothing here you shouldn't see."

Elsa tried to take the screw driver from his hand, but he pulled it back.

"Leave it," he said. "I'm dreadfully sorry if I've annoyed you; but, believe me, I've nothing but your interests at heart."

"Then why not finish your work and let me see what there is to be seen? And please don't distress yourself about shocking me, Ralph, because, if I really am not shock proof, at least I'm on the way to be. Won't you take out the other screws?"

He shook his head. "No; as a matter of fact, just before you came in, I had decided that it was hardly worth while."

She watched him, as he replaced the trays, pulled down the lid, and pushed the box against the wall, where it had been when she had left that morning, and she noticed that he never let go of the screw driver.

"You're back early," he said. "They tell me you went out early this morning. I suppose Amery has some little humanity left in his system and has let you off for the day? I saw old Tupperwill this morning; he asked after you. Queer devil, Tupperwill! You've made a hit there, Elsa, and I shouldn't be surprised if our stout friend invents another excuse for a party."

He chattered on, clearly ill at ease, anxious to go, and yet as anxious to be sure that she should not finish the work he had begun. She decided the matter for him.

"I want my room now," she said and almost pushed him out.

When she had made her change and came out into the dining room, he was on the point of leaving.

"Can I take you anywhere? Have you had lunch?"

"Yes, I've had lunch," she said, which was not true.

Her objection to his presence was so marked that presently he began pulling on his gloves.

"You mustn't imagine I had any designs on your property," he said jokingly. "And, believe me, Elsa,

I am serious when I ask you not to open that box except in my presence."

"Well, open it now," she said.

He shook his head. "No, this is not the moment. You will understand why, when"—lamely—"well, before you are much older."

When he had gone, she went into the little kitchenette in search of a screw driver, determined that she would see for herself what he was keeping from her, but apparently tools were not included in Mrs. Hallam's household equipment, and, locking the door of her room and putting the key in her pocket, she went out, to find Ralph, a worried figure, biting his nails on the sidewalk before the mansions. He seemed relieved that she had come out so soon.

"You have a key of the flat; may I have it?" she asked.

For a second he seemed inclined to refuse, and then, with a smile, he produced it from his waistcoat pocket.

"Really, Elsa, you're taking quite a high hand to deprive me of the key of my——"

"Not your flat, surely? I shouldn't like to feel that you had the means of entry day and night, Ralph," she said quietly, and for the second time that morning he colored a deep red.

Refusing his escort, she found a taxi and drove back to a City restaurant, where she had a small lunch before returning to her work. The door of Amery's room was still locked, and when she knocked, his voice asked sharply what she wanted. A few minutes after the door was unlocked, and, going into the room, she found it empty.

At three o'clock the telephone bell rang. She took all the calls in her office, and those that were intended for her employer she switched through, after she had first

made inquiries as to whether he would accept the call.

"May I speak with Miss Marlowe?" asked a familiar voice.

"Yes, I'm speaking," said Elsa.

"It is Mr. Tupperwill. Is Major Amery in?"

She recognized his voice before he told her his name.

"No, Mr. Tupperwill, he is out."

"Is it possible for me to see you, Miss Marlowe? It is on rather an important matter, and I am particularly anxious that Major Amery should not know that I have called you."

"I can see you after office hours," she said. "Otherwise, I must get his permission to leave the office."

A long silence.

"Is that absolutely and vitally necessary?" asked the anxious voice of the banker. "I assure you I would not dream of asking you to come without your employer's knowledge, unless the circumstances were very urgent; and they *are* very urgent, Miss Marlowe. I want to see you in the course of the next half hour."

Elsa considered the possibility. "I will come," she said and cut short his thanks by hanging up the receiver.

Amery allowed her more freedom than most secretaries have, and she could have gone out without reference to him; but somehow she was reluctant on this occasion to take advantage of the liberty he gave to her. She turned the matter over in her mind and then knocked at the door.

"Come in."

He had returned so quietly that she had not heard him.

"I want to go out, Major Amery, for half an hour."

"Where are you going?" he demanded bluntly.

"Somebody wants to see me—Mr. Tupperwill."

"Oh!"

"I don't think he wished you to know that I was going to him; that is rather natural, isn't it? You don't mind?"

He shook his head. "No, I don't mind a bit, but I'm glad you told me. If Tupperwill asks you whether I know where you have gone, you will tell him?"

"Why, of course!" she said in surprise.

"I think I should."

He was the strangest man, she thought, as the bus carried her toward Old Broad Street—the very strangest man. Such queer, unimportant details interested him. The big, vital things of life left him unmoved.

## CHAPTER XL

### THE NEW CHAUFFEUR

MR. TUPPERWILL'S office at the bank was situated on one of the innumerable courts that dive out of Old Broad Street and stagger through a labyrinth of passages to end no man knows where. Elsa stood on the step leading into the purlieus of the bank when Mr. Tupperwill appeared. She had the impression that he had been waiting, for he hurried down to meet her, and, taking her arm in a paternal fashion, led her deeper into the maze of crooked passages that intersected one another.

"This is a short cut that will bring us to Lothbury," he said, leaving the girl without any explanation as to the business upon which he had called her so urgently to the center of the City.

In Lothbury a car was waiting. She had a glimpse of a bearded chauffeur behind the window of his cabin.

"I haven't much time," she began.

"I won't keep you a moment longer than is necessary," said Mr. Tupperwill urgently.

The driver evidently had his instructions, for in a few minutes they were running through Moorgate Street toward the City Road.

"The matter I want to see you about is so important, so tremendously important to me, that I simply dare not interview you at the bank. There is, I believe, a young lady at your place named Miss Dame?"

She nodded.

"I have met her once," said Mr. Tupperwill, evidently laboring under the stress of a deep emotion. "She was introduced to the bank. Do you mind if I pull those curtains?"

There were side curtains to the windows, and, without waiting for her permission, the stout man leaned over and pulled them across, so as to make it impossible that they should be seen from the street. He followed suit with the curtains on the other side, and then:

"For your sake and my sake, I do not wish to be seen consulting you, Miss Marlowe."

"Why on earth not?" she demanded.

"There is a reason, a very pressing reason, which you will understand sooner or later. You know Miss Dame?"

"I know her very well."

"Are you aware"—his voice sank—"that she is a lady of considerable wealth?"

"Indeed I am not," said Elsa. "I am under the impression that her father is well off, but that she is only just as rich as he can make her."

"You think that?" Mr. Tupperwill bit his full lower lip and maintained silence until they were running through a drab street in Islington.

"Where are we going, Mr. Tupperwill? I must be back at the office in half an hour."

"I realize that. Believe me, I shall not keep you a moment longer than is necessary, and the major will hardly miss you, even if he comes back."

"He came back, just as I went out," she said, "and of course I told him that I was coming to see you."

She thought he had not heard this, for he did not answer her.

"He came back just as you were going out?" he said at last. "And you told him, of course, that you were com-



ing to see me? That I should expect you to do. It is a very small point, and one which, perhaps, would not appeal to the average employee, but I hold it as a maxim that not in the slightest degree should one deceive an employer."

They were now in a street, one side of which was occupied by a factory wall and the other by a scattering of poor houses, except toward the farther end, where there was a yard of some kind, marked by high walls and a gate which was open.

The car swung, as though it were going into the gateway, and at that moment Mr. Tupperwill sprang to his feet and, dropping the window with a crash, said something to the chauffeur. Instantly the man righted the machine and went slowly past the gates. Looking through, Elsa saw a littered quadrangle, surrounded on three sides by low buildings which had the appearance of stables.

"Now why on earth did my man do that?" gasped Mr. Tupperwill in astonishment. "I don't like it, Miss Marlowe! I don't like it at all. He is a new man who came to me only last week, and—phew!" He mopped his large face. "I'm getting to the stage where I see a plot in the simplest action. I feel as if I am moving in an atmosphere of mystery and danger. In fact, Miss Marlowe, since that outrageous attack was made upon me, I have lost my nerve."

They were now clear of the mean streets and were traversing the principal shopping thoroughfare of Islington, and, as the girl saw with relief, moving back toward the City.

"You wanted to talk to me about Miss Dame," she reminded him.

"Yes, yes, but the incident put everything out of my mind. Miss Dame—yes—a curious girl. And you

think she isn't wealthy?" he asked anxiously. "And that if she pretended to be wealthy, she was deceiving me?"

"Deceiving you! Surely she hasn't an account with Stebbing's?"

The discreet Tupperwill evaded the question. He was apparently still preoccupied with his suspicions of the new chauffeur, for suddenly he burst forth fretfully:

"I don't like it—I don't like it at all! And yet I had the most excellent references with this man."

She laughed. "Surely, Mr. Tupperwill, you're exaggerating a very insignificant incident."

"I don't know." He shook his head. "I might have been driven into that yard and murdered! You may laugh, young lady. Laughter is the prerogative of youth, but fear is the instinct of age. I must write that down; it is almost epigrammatical."

Apparently, in his agitation, he had decided to drop all discussion of Jessie Dame and her delinquencies, and he left Elsa to piece together the fragments of his disjointed references to the girl.

The car dropped her in Wood Street, and she went back to the office, a little mystified, to find the sinister man sitting before her typewriter, laboriously tapping out a letter with one finger.

"Where is the h?" he asked, without looking up.

She touched the key.

"Had a nice journey? Tupperwill ought to buy a new car."

"How did you know we went by car?"

"Feng Ho saw you," he said. "Did you notice Tupperwill's new chauffeur?"

"I saw the back of his head."

He laughed softly to himself. "You should take a good look at his neck."

"Why?"

He did not satisfy her curiosity, but, with a shudder, she knew instinctively that behind that pleasant laugh was grim menace.

"What a horrible idea!" she said, shivering.

"Yes, it is, rather. I'm sorry. And yet a murderer's neck fascinates me."

"A murderer?" she gasped.

"I rather think so." He was still tapping his painful way through the alphabet. "That chauffeur killed Maurice Tarn."

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE BEARDED LABORER

"At least, that is my view," he said, without looking up from the machine at the white-faced girl. "Where is the j? I can never find the j on these machines. Oh, here it is! Yes, a stalwart man, with a beard and motor goggles? Beard and motor goggles are attached, and the beard is really clever. It is fixed to a silk lining that fits his chin as closely as a glove fits your finger."

He was not looking at her.

"Yes, that was our friend," he went on pleasantly. "How far did you go?"

She described the journey and told him of the curious little incident of the open gate.

"I thought Mr. Tupperwill was unnecessarily alarmed," she said.

"Not unnecessarily," Amery answered gently. "Oh, no, not unnecessarily! If the car had passed through that gateway, Mr. Tupperwill would not be alive at this moment. Or, if he were alive, he would be in such a grievous plight that he would welcome a merciful end."

"Are you serious, Major Amery?"

He looked up quickly. "I'm afraid I've alarmed you. Yes, I was quite serious."

"But does Mr. Tupperwill know the character of this man?" she asked in horror.

"He will be warned before the day is out. You didn't see the chauffeur's face?"

She shook her head.

"No, I caught a glimpse of him." The driver's seat is enclosed in Mr. Tupperwill's car, and it is rather difficult to see him. I only noticed that he was a very powerful-looking man, and I thought it strange that he wore a beard. Do you really know him?"

"The chauffeur? Yes, a gentleman named Stillman. A powerful-looking fellow, eh? He is all that. What did he want to see you about—Tupperwill, I mean?"

She hesitated. "There is no reason why you shouldn't know," she said at last. "It was about Miss Dame."

"I thought it might be," he said surprisingly.

"What would have happened to me?" she demanded.

"You?" He got up slowly from his chair, slipped the page he was typing from the machine, tore it into four parts, and threw it into the wastebasket, before he replied:

"I don't think anything very bad would have happened to you, but you might have been scared."

"Then only Mr. Tupperwill was in danger?"

"In real danger, yes—danger of life or limb, and that's the only kind that counts. When are you contemplating taking tea with Miss Dame?"

"I don't know. I'm not at all anxious to go."

"Go this evening," he said. "The 'pater' will interest you."

Her anxiety did not prevent her smiling.

"You know how she refers to him, then?"

He walked into his room, and she followed. There was one question she wanted settled beyond all doubt.

"Major Amery," she began, "do you remember the night that Mr. Tupperwill was attacked?"

"I remember it perfectly."

"You know that I found the weapon in your cupboard?"

"I also know that."

"It was you who struck him?"

He nodded. "Yes, it was I. That your mind may be set at rest it was an accident. The blow was not intended for Mr. Tupperwill, and I had not the slightest idea that he was within range of my stick when I struck. And now let us forget that very unpleasant incident."

It occurred to Elsa, when she made known her intention, that Jessie Dame was not too pleased at the prospect of entertaining her friend.

"I don't know whether it will be convenient to-night," she said, and Elsa, who was quite ready to accept any excuse for dropping the project, was glad enough to murmur something about "some other evening" and make her escape.

But the visit was not to be postponed. Just as she was on the point of leaving, Jessie Dame appeared, already dressed for the street.

"I've been out to telephone to pater," she said breathlessly, "and he says he'll be very glad to see you. We'll take a taxi home, if you don't mind."

At any other time this extravagance on the part of the romantic young lady would have startled the girl, but the information which she had acquired about the wealth of the Dames made misgiving unnecessary.

The Dames' house was one of a dozen stucco dwellings in a short cul-de-sac off Ladbroke Grove. It had a tiny patch of lawn before the house, the inevitable laurel bushes planted near the railings, and the six steps up to the front door, which are peculiar to houses built at that period of Victorian history, when English and American architects were apparently obsessed with the idea that London and New York might be flooded at any moment, and that it was necessary to build the ground floors ten feet above the level of the street.

No sooner was Elsa inside the house than she realized that Jessie Dame was living in a much better style than

she had imagined. The room into which she was shown was substantially, even handsomely, appointed, and if it erred at all, it was on the side of lavishness and overornamentation.

"I'll tell Pater you're here," said Miss Dame, hurrying out of the room, to return after a considerable time with the bald and florid man whom Elsa had seen at the dance.

The first thing that struck her was the accuracy of Major Amery's description. The eyes were pale, the jaw full and fleshy, and the mustache was patently dyed. But for this and his complete baldness, Mr. Dame did not look old enough to be Jessie's father, for his complexion was flawless.

"Glad to know you, Miss Marlowe," he said.

The voice was harsh, like that of a man suffering from a cold. "I have been expecting you to come over with Jess before. Come and have a look at the house."

He was undisguisedly proud of his establishment, and not until he had shown her over every room and into the immaculate kitchen was he satisfied. To maintain a polite interest through three floors of inspection would have been a tax at any ordinary time, but there was something about this home and the personality of its owner that interested the girl. She could endure the procession from one spare room to another without fatigue and could honestly admire the economy of the kitchen equipment.

"No expense has been spared," said Mr. Dame complacently. "It's a home, as I have often told Jess, that she ought to be proud of and ask no questions. What I mean to say is, that she ought to be content with what he's got. Don't you think so, Miss?"

"I certainly do," said Elsa.

Evidently Jessie had moments of curiosity and unease, thought the girl, as she followed the proud owner into the garden. It was a long strip of land, and it showed

the practiced hand of a skilled horticulturist. Again no expense had been spared to produce, within the limits of Mr. Dame's modest estate, the best effects that money could buy.

At the bottom of the garden there was a substantially built shed, lighted by two small windows placed just under the overhanging roof. As they looked, the door opened, and a man lounged through, carrying a spade. Stripped to his shirt, he was wiping his forehead with a bare arm, as he came into the cooler air, and for an instant he did not observe Mr. Dame and his visitor. Then, almost at the second that Elsa recognized him, he scuttled back into the shed and slammed the door behind him. Quick as he was, Elsa recognized the laborer. It was the bearded chauffeur, the murderer of Maurice Tarn!



## CHAPTER XLII

### THE SIGNER OF CHECKS

APPARENTLY Mr. Dame had not noticed the incident. At the moment he was drawing attention to the tiny rock garden, and he did not observe that the girl was staring at the shed.

"Is that a garage?" she asked.

"Yes, it's a garage," replied Mr. Dame shortly. "The entrance is on the other side. There's a lane at the back. You must come here in the summer, Miss, and see my roses."

Had he noticed her white face, she wondered, for the shock had sent every vestige of color from her cheeks. Apparently Mr. Dame was so absorbed in the pride of possession that he had no eyes for aught to which he could not lay claim, and by the time the tinkle of a bell summoned them to the ornate dining room, where tea had been laid, she had recovered her self-possession.

"Well, what do you think of your boss, Miss?" demanded Jessie Dame's father, nonchalantly pouring half the contents of his cup into the saucer.

Elsa was not inclined to discuss the sinister man with anybody, least of all with an acquaintance of a few minutes.

"They tell me the life he leads you girls is perfectly hellish," Dame went on. "I keep telling Jessie to throw up the job and come home, but she's one of those obstinate girls that will have her own way. Oh, woman, woman!"

Perhaps it was his triteness, or the string of commonplaces, that reminded her for a second of Mr. Tupperwill, except that she liked the stout banker and disliked this man, with his furtive, cold blue eyes, most intensely.

"You have a car, Mr. Dame?" she asked, anxious to keep off the subject of Amery.

"I haven't, but I'm getting one. I've had the garage built three or four years, but never used it. In fact, I haven't been inside the place for a year."

"Father doesn't like anybody to go into the garage," said Jessie. "He says he won't let anybody enter until he's got a car to see. I wonder he hasn't bought it before."

"All in good time; everything comes to her who waits," said Mr. Dame complacently.

When at last the time came for the girl to go, Jessie accompanied her to the sidewalk.

"What do you think of the pater?" she asked.

"He's a very interesting man," said Elsa safely.

"Yes, he's pretty interesting," said Jessie, without any trace of enthusiasm. "I suppose you're going home now? It must be nice to live alone."

Elsa looked at the girl quickly. There was something wistful in her eyes and in her voice, a human quality that momentarily transfigured her; but it was only for a flash, and then she was herself again.

"Come down and see us any time you want a cup of tea. The pater will be glad to show you over the garden," she said, and, running up the steps, she closed the door almost before Elsa had left the gate.

Mr. Dame was waiting in the dining room when his daughter came back to him, and he was carefully carving off the end of a cigar.

"That's she. is it?"

"Yes, that's she. Why were you so anxious to see her, father?"

"Why was I so anxious to see her, father?" he mimicked. "You get out of the habit of asking questions, will you? Now what have you got for me?"

She went to the side table, where she had put her attaché case when she came in, opened it and took out a few sheets of crumpled paper, which she passed to him.

"What is this?" he demanded wrathfully.

"It was all I could find," she said. "I got them out of the wastebasket."

"Didn't he write any other letters?"

"He may have done so," said the girl. "Father, I think he's suspicious. Up to now the letters have come to me to be entered in the dispatch book before they were posted. This afternoon he kept back all his own letters, and, when I sent the office boy to ask for them, he said he was posting them himself in future."

The man scowled from his daughter to the crumpled typewritten sheets in his hand.

"These are all the same letter," he said. "What is the use of them to me?"

"I don't know, father. I've done all I could," said Miss Dame quietly. "I'm sure there are times when I feel ashamed to look him in the face, prying and sneaking as I do; and if Miss Marlowe only knew——"

"Shut up about Miss Marlowe 'only knowing,'" he said gruffly. "What I want to know is, why haven't I got his letters?"

"I've told you," said the girl, with an air of desperation. "I can't take them out of his hand and copy them, can I? It was easy when they came to me to be entered, but he's stopped that now, and I'll have to do as I did before—get any scraps I can from the wastebasket."

He was reading the letter carefully, word by word, his stubby finger following the lines.

"'F. O. I.'—what's that?" he muttered to himself. "All right, Jessie, you can go up to your room. Be dressed by seven o'clock, and I'll take you out and give you some dinner."

She shook her head. "I don't want to go to-night."

"What you want to do, and what I want you to do, are two different things," he shouted. "Get dressed!"

Jessie Dame ran like a scared rabbit, and when, three quarters of an hour later, she came down to the dining room, she saw that he was still in his day suit.

"I've changed my mind about taking you out," he said. "You must go by yourself. And sign these before you go."

There were three blank checks on the table; they were upon Stebbing's Bank, and, taking up the pen, she signed, in her angular writing, "H. Stillman," blotted them, and gave them back to him.

"Is there nothing else, father?" she asked timidly.

"Yes, there is something else. You'll dine at the Cardinal and go on to the Mispah about half past nine. If anybody asks you where I am, you can tell them that I'm on the premises somewhere. You'll stay at the Mispah till two o'clock. You've always said that you like being with classy people—well, you'll stay with 'em a little later to-night. You understand?"

"Yes, father," she said meekly.

"I don't want you back a minute before two."

"Yes, father," she said again; then she picked up her cloak from the chair and went out. And none would guess, seeing the misery in her face, that Jessie Dame was sallying forth to the desirable association of classy people.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### MR. TUPPERWILL SEEKS ADVICE

LONG after Elsa had left the office, Major Amery was sitting at his desk, his swift pen covering sheet after sheet of foolscap. He wrote a beautifully clear, almost copper-plate hand, and with a rapidity which, in all the circumstances, was remarkable.

He had come to the bottom of the sixth sheet, when there was a gentle tap on his door, and, rising, he crossed the floor, turned the key, and pulled the door open. It was the night watchman who was in charge of the premises between business hours.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I don't want to disturb you, but there's a gentleman wishes to see you—Mr. Tupperwill."

Amery looked at his watch; it was half past six.

"Show him up, please," he said, and, going back to his desk, he put his writing away in a drawer and swung round in his chair to face the door through which Mr. Tupperwill presently came.

The banker was obviously ill at ease. He closed the door behind him and stood behind the chair to which Amery pointed, his hands resting on the back, grotesquely reminiscent of a budding politician about to make his maiden speech.

"You will think this visit is remarkable, Major Amery," he began huskily, "particularly since I cannot claim to be—ah—a very close friend, or even an intimate acquaintance."

"I was expecting you to come," said Amery shortly. "Won't you sit down?"

Mr. Tupperwill lifted the tails of his frock coat and sat gingerly.

"The truth is, I am in such confusion of mind that I hardly know which way to turn, whose advice to seek; and, thinking matters over in the privacy of my office, I decided that you, as a man of the world, and a man, moreover, of vast experience beyond my range, would perhaps be able to assist me in forming a conclusion. Major Amery, I am beset by enemies; and, if that sounds to you a little highly colored and melodramatic, I beg that you will bear with me for a little while. The matter which I will ask your patience to discuss, affects not only the honor of my name, but the very foundations of my business."

He stopped and licked his dry lips. Amery made no reply; he sat, tense and alert, waiting for what was to follow.

"You were good enough, at a moment when I was extremely angry, to make a prediction which, alas, seems upon the point of fulfillment," Mr. Tupperwill went on. "That prediction, in effect, was that a certain client of the bank would drag me and my business into the mud. I fear, I very greatly fear, that your prediction is within measurable distance of fulfillment. Major Amery, I have trusted a certain person beyond limits that a banker and a business man can safely go. I have been deceived, terribly deceived. The bank has been the victim of the grossest duplicity; and now, not only is my fortune, but my very life, threatened, as the result of my stupendous folly.

"Two years ago, I was at the head of a flourishing commercial concern, respected and honored throughout the City of London."

"Two years ago," interrupted Amery, "you were at the head of a bankrupt business, which was maintained in existence by the falsification of accounts!" His words fell like hammer blows upon steel. "Stebbing's has been insolvent for years," he went on remorselessly. "It is your boast that you defied the efforts of the joint stock banks to absorb you. The truth is, that you dare not allow an impartial investigation into the affairs of Stebbing's, knowing right well that honest auditors would bring you into the criminal court, and that eventually you would land in one of his majesty's prisons."

Mr. Tupperwill did not change color, but there was a pathetic droop to his lip and an almost tearful entreaty in his eyes, as he blinked stupidly at his accuser.

"I hope that what you say is not true," he said in a hushed voice. "If it is, then indeed I have been more grossly deceived than I imagined, and there has been a conspiracy to deceive me. It is true that I am in a bad way. Certain indiscretions, which came to the knowledge of an unscrupulous man, have placed me in his power. The circumstances I have put down in black and white," he said impressively, "and I have come to you to ask you whether, if that document were placed in your hands, it would be of any service to you or to me?"

"None whatever," said Amery promptly, and Mr. Tupperwill's face fell.

"On the last occasion we met, you referred to a gentleman named—ah—Stillman. Now, Major Amery, I wish to avoid unpleasantness; I wish to avoid ruin! You, knowing so much, can advise me. It may be that this is the last time that you and I will ever discuss this matter, the last opportunity for adjustment."

Amery looked at him steadily. "There will be other opportunities," he said.

Before the interview ended, Mr. Tupperwill had something else to say.

"I am a man of peace. The violent expressions of human feeling are repugnant, indeed, terrifying to me. I have had one horrible experience and do not wish that to be repeated."

He touched the scar on his head feelingly.

"And yet I have the sensation that I am drifting into a welter of violence. That I am surrounded by unscrupulous, evil, possibly cruel, men, who will not hesitate to wreak their vengeance on me, and I am appealing to you, as a man of action, for help and guidance. Major Amery, a week ago I engaged a new chauffeur. The man came to me with the most excellent credentials; he had a character from the army; he had eulogistic recommendations from previous employers; and, as a chauffeur, he is everything that I could desire, except"—he hesitated—"I cannot escape a suspicion that he is not what he seems. The man has come in and out of my house without let or hindrance, and my butler informs me that on one occasion he has found him in my bedroom."

Leaning forward, he went on, in a lower voice.

"In my bedroom is a wall safe, in which I keep a few important papers, a number of trinkets of no especial value, and this morning I missed a small book, containing particulars of my private account. It was not an ordinary book; it has the appearance of a gold case, and it was presented to me by my dear father many years ago."

"What is in the book besides your accounts?"

"Nothing—a number of addresses, a few memoranda about our family fortune, particulars of the combination of my safe at the office, and my private deposits at the Bank of England."



"If you think this man has stolen it," said Amery, with a weary sigh, "why don't you call in the police?"

Mr. Tupperwill raised his eyes slowly to the other's.

"You have told me my business is bankrupt; you have taunted me with the fact that I dare not allow independent investigation; you have suggested that there are secrets about Stebbing's which could not be revealed. One or two of those secrets are in that book, Major Amery."

He rose with a long-drawn sigh.

"I fear I have wearied you," he said, "but remember that I am a man torn with anxiety and doubt, a man placed in the most cruel dilemma. Your advice, your help, your coöperation would have meant much to me, and, perhaps, much to you."

He brushed his silk hat on his sleeve in an absent-minded way, looked thoughtfully at the shattered face of the cupboard by the side of the fireplace, and then, with another sigh and a little bow, waddled out, a picture of dejection.

Amery sat listening to his footfalls, until there was silence in the office. Then he lit a thin black cigar and blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. A deep frown furrowed his forehead; his expression was one of irritation. Nobody would have guessed that his mind was wholly concentrated upon Elsa Marlowe.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### MAJOR AMERY GOES OUT

THE church bells were striking seven when he walked out into Wood Street and, reaching Cheapside, allowed three taxis to pass him before he called the fourth. Before he could put his hand upon the bell of his door, it was opened by Feng Ho, who followed him into his study.

"Do you know a man named Jarvie?"

Amery nodded.

"He was arrested this afternoon. He and a man named Sainson, at Hull."

Amery nodded again. "Bickerson is busy," he said. "One supposes that the fall of Doctor Ralph Hallam is very near at hand."

"If I had my way, he should sleep on the Terraces of the Night," said Feng Ho murderously. They were speaking in the Chinese dialect, the Chinaman standing by the desk, looking down at his master, as he went over his letters.

"That is a heavy punishment for folly, Feng Ho."

"For murder, master," said Feng Ho. "For this Hallam killed the old man. Was I not in the room, searching, when he came in? Did I not hear, with my remarkable ears, the 'swiff' of the knife, as it came from his pocket. I think I was a fool to have turned out the lights when I came into the house, but it was very tempting. The control switch is just inside the door below the stairs, and I turned it out because I wanted to make

sure whether the old man was awake. If he had been, the lights going out would have brought him on to the landing."

"Nevertheless, you're wrong. The man who killed Tarn was Stillman."

The Chinaman clucked his lips impatiently, but made no other comment. He followed his master upstairs, and, while he was in his bath, laid out Amery's dress suit. The sinister man had nearly finished his dressing before he gave his instructions.

"I shall be in Box I—that is the box nearest to the stage. Get me the 'listener.'"

Feng Ho found a small flat black box in a drawer and, bulky as it was, Amery put it in the tail pocket of his dress coat.

"And a gun," said Amery.

Feng Ho produced from the same receptacle a short, heavy Browning, snapped home the magazine, and, pulling back the jacket, fastened the safety catch.

"This is better," he said.

As if by magic, there appeared in his hand a short, broad knife with a lacquered handle. He stropped it tenderly on his palm and, stooping, picked up a piece of tissue paper that had come out of Amery's collar box; this he rolled into a ball and threw it into the air. As it fell, the knife flickered, and the paper ball fell in two parts.

"'All men fear steel,'" he said, quoting the old Cantonese proverb, with some smugness. "It is silent and swift and very satisfactory."

Major Amery smiled. "So I should think," he said dryly, "but I will take the gun." He pushed it into his hip pocket. "And now get me sandwiches and a glass of Tokay. Have the car in the little street that runs by Covent Garden Market. You'd better be in the

crowd before the portico. There is always a throng to see people going into the opera."

He finished his apology for a dinner; then he took up the telephone and called a number.

"Is that Scotland Yard? I want to speak to Superintendent Wille."

After a long delay, a voice answered him which he knew was not the superintendent's.

"Major Amery," he said, in answer to the inquiry.

After another little wait there was a click, and Wille's gruff voice greeted him curtly.

"It is Major Amery speaking. I have an important statement to make to the police, and I wish to see Mr. Bickerson at my house at eleven o'clock."

"What is it about?" asked Wille.

"I think I would rather tell Bickerson. He is in charge of the case."

"A dope story, eh? All right, I'll get in touch with him and send him to you."

"At eleven o'clock," said Amery, as he hung up the receiver, with a little smile.

The news of Jarvie's arrest had come to Ralph Hallam like a thunderclap, and when it had been followed by a long-distance phone call from Hull, telling him that a second member of the gang had been taken, he was almost panic-stricken. That evening he spent an uncomfortable hour locked in his room, burning papers and small account books, and it was nine o'clock before he remembered that he had promised to call on Lou, and that she would be waiting for him.

He found his wife fuming.

"I'm supposed to be going to dinner," she said shrilly. "Haven't you got any clocks in your house?"

"Go to supper instead," he snarled. "Where is the girl?"

"In her room," snapped Mrs. Hallam, "where she spends all her evenings. Is she staying here for life?"

"She'll be going in a day or two. Come in here."

He opened the drawing room door and almost dragged her in.

"Now listen, Lou: I'm in a pretty bad way. There is trouble—police trouble—and it will require all my ingenuity to crawl out of the wreckage when my affairs collapse, as they will very shortly. I have a little ready money, but I want a whole lot, and you've got to help me all you can, unless you wish your allowance to drop dead."

"What is all this?" she asked suspiciously.

"Now listen." She saw he was in deadly earnest. "I want you to stay here till eleven o'clock, then you can go out to supper. You were going to the Mispah, weren't you? There's a late dance. Stay till it breaks—that will be two in the morning."

She shot a suspicious glance at him. "I see," she said, and he would have been dense if he had missed the sneer in her tone.

"No harm is coming to the girl; you need have no fear of that," he assured her.

"Even that wouldn't keep me awake at night," she said callously. "But I think you're well advised, Ralph, not to go too far there. She's got a letter for you."

His mouth opened in amazement.

"A letter for me? What do you mean?"

"The maid found it under her pillow this morning, addressed to Doctor Ralph Hallam, and in Amery's handwriting. On the top of the envelope are the words 'To be used in emergency.' You're looking a little white, Ralph. What has he got on you?"

"Nothing," said the man roughly. "How do you know it is his?"

"If I didn't know, I'd guess," she said coolly. "He put his initials to the last remark—'P. A.' So I warn you, go slow!"

"I tell you no harm will come to the girl. It isn't the girl I want at all; it is something else. I've thought it all out, Lou. Suppose I appear in the middle of the night, she'll think all sorts of things; but when I say that I just want to look at the box, she'll be glad enough to let me take it out."

"What is in the box?" she asked curiously. "I looked into it the other day; the bottom part is screwed down. Do you want me to stay on till eleven? Is that necessary?"

He nodded. "It will be better if she thinks you're here. I can explain to her later that you've gone out. What is she doing?"

"Listening to that darned monkey box," she said impatiently, and then: "Very well, I will do as you ask. Do you want anything?"

"Nothing, except a key. She has mine."

She handed him a flat key, and he put it in his pocket.

"Wait! Before you go, I'd like to hear some more about this crash and wreck and crawling out that you were talking about when you came in. Ralph, what's your game? Are you dope running?"

"How did you guess?" he asked.

"It's the only kind of crime so free from danger that you'd take it on," she said quietly. "Tarn was in it, too, wasn't he? I thought so. And is Tupperwill?"

"Tupperwill!" he said contemptuously. "I don't think he's got too much money, but he's straight enough."

She laughed quietly.

"That idea struck me, too—I mean, about his having no money. Even if he does have his books bound in gold——"

She checked herself, as she saw his piercing eye upon her.

"I peeped into his library when I was there," she went on glibly. "He's certainly a highbrow reader."

She saw him out and shut the door on him, then came back to her bedroom, opened a little drawer and took out a shining gold object, that might have been mistaken for a bloated cigarette case, but was, in fact, a small notebook bound between golden covers. She turned the thin leaves with a contemptuous curl of her lip and threw the thing back into the drawer. She had taken a lot of trouble and a considerable risk for nothing, and there was certainly more satisfaction in surveying, as she did with pride, a brilliant diamond sunburst that she had acquired during her visit to India.

At ten o'clock she knocked at Elsa's door and went in, without invitation, since she had learned by experience that an enthusiastic listener-in cannot hear anything but the sounds which are coming from the ether.

Elsa took off her headpieces, with a smile.

"It is very beautiful. I wonder you don't listen, Mrs. Hallam," she said. "Are you going out?"

"I don't know," said Lou mendaciously. "I haven't quite made up my mind what to do. You are all right here?"

"Perfectly," said Elsa. "Please don't worry about me. And, Mrs. Hallam, I think I have found a flat for myself. I don't want to inflict myself upon you a day longer than is necessary."

"You're welcome," said Lou Hallam mechanically. "Just stay as long as you like, my dear."

She looked down at the box against the wall.

"Why don't you have that old thing put into my lumber room?" she asked. "It takes up a lot of space here and you could easily have it moved."

"I think it had better stay here until I go," said Elsa, and thereafter the conversation drifted into awkward pauses, the girl anxious to get back to her opera, Mrs. Hallam just as anxious to begin her dressing.

At last an excuse came; the telephone bell rang in the dining room, and Mrs. Hallam went out. It was Ralph.

"You might keep your eye on the street outside," he said. "If you see anybody who is apparently watching the house, will you let me know?"

"Are you scared of that?" she asked, and then was cursed for her insolence.

When Elsa resumed her listening, she discovered that the broadcasting station had switched over. She listened to weather reports, the latest news, barometer readings, and the like.

"In a quarter of an hour," said the voice from nowhere, "we shall switch you over to the opera house and you will hear the last act of 'Faust.'"

She put down the head phones and took up a book, trying to read. But her mind was elsewhere, as it had been, even as she listened to Gounod's masterpiece. There was something very fascinating about the sinister man, but it wasn't the fascination that the spectacle of perversity exercises. She felt that she had penetrated the outer layer of his nature, and had learned something of the real man which lay beneath. He puzzled her; he frightened her; but he never revolted her. Her keen woman's instinct had vibrated to the fineness of his character, and, whatever were his offenses, his wrongdoings, she felt he was a good man. It was so absurd a conclusion that she almost laughed.

And yet he was good, and, despite his bearishness, kindly, and, behind his suspicions, trustful. She could not understand him; he was a man who must be taken in the whole, his faults accepted, his delinquencies ex-



cused. She wondered how many women had fallen in love with him, or whether any had had the vision to get beneath the unpleasing surface and find something worshipping. Not that she worshiped him, she told herself hastily, or even loved him. She wasn't sure, now that she came to analyze her mind, that she liked him. This was sliding on a treacherous surface, she decided, and took up her head phones in time to hear the burst of applause that followed the opening aria.

The reception was perfect; it almost seemed as if she were sitting in a box within a few feet of the stage. Every note, every delicate cadence, was clearly marked.

Marguerite was singing when, of a sudden, the voice died down, and, instead, came a hubbub of sound which she could not understand. A voice said: "Go away—get off the stage!" And then another spoke thunderously in her ears.

"Elsa!"

She gasped. It was the voice of Major Amery.

"Elsa, lock your door and barricade it. Admit nobody! Do you hear? Lock your door immediately. You are in the deadliest danger!"

## CHAPTER XLV

### THE ALARM CALL

ALMOST at the back of his box Major Amery sat, listening, and yet not listening, to the delicious harmonies of the opera. The box next to him was empty. Twice he had opened the little black box and taken out something which looked like a stethoscope, the disk end of which he had applied to the wall. No sound came from the box, until the curtain had gone up on the last act of "Faust." Then, without the aid of his microphone, he heard a sound of chairs being moved. Two men had come into the box, and he judged, from the location of their voices, that they, too, were sitting well back from observation. He put the receiver to the wall and listened, immediately recognizing the two voices.

"——she is the biggest card to play. We may be able to pull off a hundred to one chance if you get her——"

The second voice mumbled something, and then:

"——I had thought of that. We can kill two birds with one stone. The stuff is in the box, of course? The old man took it away from Stanford's the night before his death and brought it to his place in Elgin Crescent. It is all American stuff and easy to change, but I must have the girl as well. I have arranged that—— Eleven o'clock—five minutes to eleven—— I believe in working to a time-table."

There was a silence, and at that moment Amery incautiously jerked at the thin wire connecting the microphone with the small battery at the bottom of the black

box. The wire snapped. Instantly his capable fingers were stripping the silk covering from either end, and a new junction was made. But when he put the receiver to the wall, there was a silence. He thought for a moment that the battery had gone wrong, and, dropping the ear pieces, he stepped out into the corridor and opened the door of the next box stealthily. It was empty!

"Five minutes to eleven!"

And they worked to schedule! He looked at his watch and gasped. It was exactly that hour.

Only for a second did he hesitate. Marguerite was in the center of the stage, enthralling the silent audience with her glorious voice, but he did not see her, did not hear her. All he knew was that, somewhere in London, a defenseless girl was listening-in, and in another second he had leaped from his box to the stage.

Immediately the house was in an uproar. Marguerite fell back affrighted, on the verge of tears; fierce voices called him from the wings; but he was walking along the footlights, looking for the microphone, and then he found it and, stooping, shouted his warning. In another second strong arms had gripped him and pulled him back out of sight, and he was facing an enraged manager.

"Send for a policeman," said a shrill voice. "He's drunk!"

Two stalwart stage hands were holding his arms; the manager, almost hysterical with rage, was shaking his fist in the expressionless face; and then Amery said:

"Take me to your office. I've something to say to you."

"You can say it here!" screamed the theatrical man.

"How dare you, you scoundrel!"

Amery said something in a low voice, and the man's expression changed.

"You're probably bluffing, but come along," he said

gruffly, and the sinister man followed him to a little office behind the stage.

There was a telephone on the table, and, without asking permission, Amery took it up.

He got his party, and for three minutes he was speaking rapidly, fiercely, while the dazed manager listened, dumbfounded. Presently he put the instrument down.

"The way out—quick!"

The manager piloted him down and up stairs, along narrow corridors, and finally into the street.

"I'll help you find your car. Do you want any assistance?"

Amery shook his head. "Herbert Mansions," he said, as he sprang on the footboard and took his place by the driver's side. "Go slow, as you go round the corner; I want to pick up Feng Ho. After that, remember, there are no traffic regulations in London for me to-night!"

Elsa heard the words and listened, stunned, for a moment beyond comprehension. It was the voice of the sinister man, warning her to lock her door.

She tore the phones from her head, ran to the door, and turned the key, and, as she did so, she heard a rustling sound outside, and the handle turned in her hand.

"Who is there?" she asked affrighted.

And then there came to her ears a scream that ended in a stifled sob, a scream that turned her blood to water.

"Help!"

It was Lou Hallam's scream that rose and died to a gurgle.

She thought she was going to faint, but, calling into play all her will power, she pulled at the box and set it against the door. In another minute the little bedstead had been wrenched across the room and wedged against the box.

"Open, I want to come in," said a muffled voice.

"Who are you?"

"Open the door, I tell you. I won't hurt you. I want the box. Give me the box."

"Who are you?" she asked again. "Where is Mrs. Hallam? What have you done to her?"

She heard a muffled curse, and then the door shook under his weight.

There were two men there now; she heard them in consultation. What should she do? She ran to the window and threw it open. The street below was deserted. There was no escape that way. If she could only see somebody—somebody to whom she could appeal.

Mrs. Hallam's flat was on the third floor, and escape from this direction was impossible. Presently she saw a figure crossing the road, and she screamed.

"Stop that!" cried a voice from the passage, hoarse with anger and fear. "Stop shouting, or I'll shoot!"

At that moment the panel smashed in, and she saw a pair of eyes glaring at her malevolently and shrank back.

It was just then that the whine of a car came to her ears. She looked out again; the machine had stopped at the door; three men were getting out and were racing up the flagged path to the vestibule. The assailant outside had heard something too.

"Thank Heaven!" she cried wildly.

The man outside heard her voice; there was a rustle of footsteps in the passage, and then suddenly the corridor, which had been in darkness, was illuminated, and she heard a familiar voice.

"Don't move, my friend, unless you have an important appointment with Saint Peter."

It was Amery!

A door slammed; it was the kitchen door, which was almost opposite her own, and she heard a smothered ex-

climation of annoyance from the major. In another second she saw him, through the hole in the door, pass to the kitchen and switch on the lights. She saw that the outer door of the kitchen was wide open, and that he went out to a small balcony and peered down. Then he came back.

"Are you all right?" he asked sharply.

"Yes—yes!" she quavered. "I'm quite all right. Have they gone?"

"They've gone, all right," was the grim reply. "There is a service lift from the kitchen balcony; I think they slid down the rope."

She was making a feeble effort to remove the barricade, but her strength had suddenly evaporated, and she had to stop twice and sit down, before eventually she removed the final obstacle and opened the door to him.

In the passage by the front door she saw Feng Ho and a man in uniform, whom she recognized as Amery's chauffeur.

"Feng Ho, get the lady some water," said Amery shortly. "Where is Mrs. Hallam?"

She could not speak until the water came.

"I don't know—I thought she had gone out," gasped the girl, as she lifted the glass to her lips with a trembling hand, "but I heard somebody scream—dreadfully!"

He left her and walked into the dining room, turning on the lights. The room was empty. From there he passed to the drawing-room, with the same result.

"Where does she sleep?"

The girl pointed. The door of Mrs. Hallam's room was locked, and he rattled on the handle.

"Somebody is there," he said and flung his whole weight at the door, which burst open with a crash.

He turned on the light and stood for a moment gaz-

ing at the sight which presented itself. Mrs. Hallam lay half on and half off her bed; her face was blue, her handsome dress was torn, and there was blood on her white shoulder, but more menacing was the silk scarf tied about her throat.

In an instant Amery was at her side and had removed the strangling silk.

His voice brought the girl, who, at sight of the woman's plight, forgot her own weakness. Together they lifted her on to the bed; and, while the girl searched for brandy at his request, Major Amery made a rapid inspection of the apartment.

In many ways it resembled his own study after the visit of the unknown burglars. Drawers had been opened, and their contents thrown on the floor; the dressing table had been swept clean. For what had they been searching, he wondered. Hitherto he had not regarded Mrs. Hallam as a serious factor in the game. And yet this had been no wanton attack; there was a reason behind it. What that reason was, he was determined to discover. In a few minutes the woman recovered consciousness, staring at him blankly.

"Was it you?" she croaked.

He shook his head.

"If you mean, was it I that attacked you, I can reassure you on that point," he said. "Have you lost anything?"

With difficulty she got up to her feet and staggered across to the dressing table.

"The book is gone—that's all, the book!"

"The book? What book?" he asked quickly.

"A little gold book."

A light suddenly dawned on the sinister man.

"Tupperwill's?"

She nodded.

"How did you come to have it? But I can guess the answer. You took it, then?"

She nodded again. "I borrowed it." She spoke with difficulty.

"I see."

So that was the explanation—and a logical one!

"Now, young lady"—he turned to the girl—"I think we can leave Mrs. Hallam for a while. I want to see you in a place of safety. Will you stay here for five minutes and promise not to move?"

She nodded, and the next instant he had disappeared. She guessed, from the direction he took, that he was in her room, and she speculated on what took him there. True to his word, he was back in five minutes, carrying a suit case which she recognized as her own. The thought that he had been collecting her clothes was so odd that she could have laughed.

"I think the Palace Hotel is a very safe place for you to-night," he said.

The girl glanced at Mrs. Hallam, who had recovered her normal pallor.

"You had better ring up your husband and tell him——" he began, and then the sound of a key in the front door made him walk into the passage.

Ralph Hallam stood stock-still at the unexpected apparition of the sinister Amery.



## CHAPTER XLVI

### THE ARREST

"WHAT are you doing here?" he asked harshly.

"The same question might be applied to you," was the cool response. "Really, Hallam, you are the quickest mover I know!"

"Where are you going, Elsa?" demanded Hallam.

"I'll save this lady the trouble of answering you. I'm taking her to the Palace Hotel, where she will be safer."

Ralph saw the light coming from his wife's room and strode down the passage. One glance he gave at the room, its tumbled contents, and the pale face of the woman, and then he spun round.

"What is the explanation of this?" he demanded. "You're not getting away with this, Amery."

"Somebody attacked your wife and made his escape, as I came in."

"How did you get in?"

Amery smiled. "I am going to answer no more questions to-night. I haven't the time," he said and was walking to the door, when Ralph stood before him.

"What have you got in that suit case?"

Amery considered a second, then: "Something over a million dollars," he said coolly, "the property of Miss Marlowe. I found it in the bottom of her box, and I am now about to put it in a place of safety."

Ralph's face went red and white.

"You're not leaving here until you explain——"

"To-morrow I'll give you an explanation that will satisfy you," said Amery, with a touch of his old irascibility. "For the moment you've got to do some quick guessing. I've warned you once before, Hallam, that there isn't room for two crowds in your profession, and you are on the edge of finding how truthful I can be! Get home and lock yourself tight—or, better still, club a policeman and get yourself arrested. The angel of death is abroad to-night!"

Ralph Hallam staggered against the wall and watched the two pass out of sight, like a man in a dream, dazed and powerless to move.

Feng Ho was waiting outside the door, and to him Amery issued a word of instructions.

"You will remain here; trail Hallam. I want to know where I can find him."

They passed down the stairs into the deserted street. His chauffeur was turning the car, and opposite the door was a taxicab which had apparently just driven up, for two men stood talking to the driver. Amery's subsequent error was excusable.

"You men come from Superintendent Wille?"

"Wille? I don't know anything about Wille, but we're from Scotland Yard," said one of them unpleasantly. "Are you Amery?"

"That is my name."

"I have a warrant for your arrest, major."

Amery looked at him incredulously. "A warrant for me? What is the charge?"

"You hardly want telling that, do you? You'll find out when you get to the station. I have only instructions to take you into custody."

There was a silence.

"There is some mistake here," Amery said. "At any

rate, I'll go along with you, but perhaps you will let me first drop this lady at the Palace Hotel?"

The man did not answer, but followed him into the taxi, handing the suit case to the driver, and, by the light of a street standard which flashed past, the prisoner caught a glimpse of a long-barreled revolver in the detective's hand. The man must have known that the weapon had been seen, for he said:

"I'm giving you a word of advice, Major Amery. Don't put your hand to your hip pocket, or you'll be shot. I'm taking no risks with you. And, while we're discussing the subject"—he pressed the muzzle of the pistol against the other's white waistcoat and, reaching down, drew the Browning from his pocket. In another instant a circle of steel snapped about Amery's wrist.

"Hold still, or you'll get hurt," said the other man, speaking for the first time.

The voice sounded familiar to the girl, but it was Major Amery who identified the man.

"Can it be 'pater?'" he asked mockingly. "Really, Mr. Dame, I've misjudged you—I thought you did no work for a living!"

Jessie Dame's father! Elsa uttered a cry, as she too identified the man. What did it mean? Was he a detective?

Amery's next words put the matter beyond all doubt.

"This is a trap, and I have fallen right into it," he said, "an old stager like me! Where are we going?"

"You'll find out."

She heard the jingle of Amery's handcuffs, and then a bright light pierced the gloom, as one of their captors switched a pocket lamp upon the manacled hands.

"'Perfectly marvelous,' as your daughter would say," sneered Amery. "No precautions omitted, no risks

taken, eh? I see we are taking the back-street route, and, I guess, a very circuitous one at that, but not to a police station, I gather? Where are we going?" he asked again.

"Wait and find out," growled Dame.

"At least you will allow the lady to leave us?"

Dame guffawed. "To go to the nearest copper and spill it?" he asked contemptuously. "Have a bit of sense, major. Besides, we want her."

Of course they wanted her, he remembered. She was to be the hundred-to-one chance that they were banking on.

With the light on his wrists, there was no chance of ridding himself of the handcuffs, and he knew these characters too well to make any attempt to attract the attention of the very few pedestrians they passed.

They had not a very long distance to go. The car passed up a street composed of a suburban type of house, turned into a narrow opening, and stopped before what looked to be a one-storeyed building. The driver of the taxi got down, opened the door, and first Amery and then the girl were led into the darkness.

Scarcely had the cab disappeared, carrying Amery and his captors, than Feng Ho flew down the sidewalk and called sharply to the chauffeur who had just drawn up by the cab.

"Where is the major?" he asked.

"I don't know; I'm waiting for him."

"He came out this moment. Didn't you see him, oh, foolish, blind man?"

"I saw a man and a lady, but I didn't know it was the major. Why did he go off in a cab?"

Feng Ho uttered something in Chinese, and at that moment he was joined by the ruffled Ralph Hallam.

"Did you see him go, medical doctor?"

"See who go?" asked the other sourly. "If you mean Amery, I didn't."

He was turning to walk away, when Feng Ho seized his arm and poured forth such a stream of voluble, pedantic English that for a time Hallam could not grasp his meaning.

"Who is he?" he asked incredulously.

"They have incarcerated him, I tell you, medical sir," said the Chinaman, in a state of anguish.

"Tell me again what you said—who is Major Amery?"

And, when Feng Ho had finished, Ralph turned to the chauffeur.

"Which way did the cab go?"

"I didn't notice, sir. You can easily find out. Drive up to the end of the road."

It was not until Feng Ho gave the order that the chauffeur obeyed.

At the end of the street they found a policeman who had seen a cab, which might or might not have been that in which Amery was traveling. When, after five minutes' drive, they overtook the taxi, they found it was empty. Another clew brought as unsatisfactory an ending, and then, when Feng Ho had sent the car in a third direction and had himself elected to walk to the nearest police station, a cab came past, and he saw, by the reflected light of the lamp that was burning inside, a face which he immediately recognized.

It was only for the fraction of a second that he saw the man. The cab was going at a good pace, and there was no time to recall the car. With long, tireless strides, Feng Ho went in pursuit. The machine drove across Bayswater Road, entered a narrow thoroughfare that opened into a square, and then began the ascent of a slight rise.

He was gaining on the cab when there appeared from

nowhere four men, two from each side of the road, and without warning they closed in upon him. Gasping and breathless, Feng Ho stood at bay, a knife in his hand. He drove the first man back, but the second caught him under his guard. He did not see the flicker of steel that brought him low, and, with a choking sob, he fell on his knees, and the man with the knife struck again.

"Into that garden, quick!" hissed his assailant who had struck at him.

They lifted the limp figure, and, with a swing, flung it over the railings. There was a thud, as the body struck, and then silence.

"Mind how you step," warned Dame. "Have you got that chain there?"

The taxi driver pushed past them, and Amery heard the jangle of a chain being passed through what he guessed was a bolt or socket of some kind. Then his hands were seized, something snapped on the connecting chain of the handcuffs, and he was drawn to the wall until the links touched what he found to be a steel bolt through which the chain had been drawn.

"Don't you step anywhere, Miss," warned Dame, "or you'll break your neck!"

The door had been shut behind them, but even the confinement of the place could not account for the curiously dead sound of their voices. There was a splutter of flame, as Dame's companion lit a lantern candle, and by its light Amery saw that the driver had disappeared.

They were in a brick shed measuring some twenty feet by ten. He could only guess it was brick, because the walls were hung with dark-brown army blankets, and this had accounted for the unusual deadness of all sound. In the middle of this apartment, which was floored with cement, was a deep hole, as near as he could judge, some

five or six feet in depth, of similar length, and about two feet wide. It had obviously been dug by skilled hands.

"What is that?" whispered the girl.

She was crouching at Amery's side.

"It looks like pater's garage," he said coolly. "You know what this place reminds me of, Dame?"

"I don't want to hear anything from you," growled the man.

"It reminds me of an execution shed. That hole could be made a little wider and a little deeper, a wooden trap, a lever for release, a stout oak beam and a steel winch. It's a horrible feeling to be wakened at six in the morning and be told to dress yourself in the clothes you wore at the trial. I've seen men go mad—better men than you, Dame. Ever read Wilde's poem:

"The hangman with his gardener gloves  
Slips through the padded door,  
And binds one with three leathern thongs  
That the throat may thirst no more."

"Blast you!" screamed Dame, his face livid and in his eyes a great fear. "I'll tear your cursed tongue out if you don't keep your mouth shut!"

Amery chuckled softly. He had to look across his shoulder at the man, for he was held tight to the bolt in the wall.

"Come on, you!" Dame was speaking to the girl, and Amery's eyes glittered.

"You'll look after her, Dame, because, while there is a chance of reprieve for plain murder, any aggravation of the crime, anything that turns the jury's mind to loathing—don't forget they have woman jurors in murder trials—will make it hard for you and friend Stillman."

"Take her out!" cried Dame hoarsely. "Through that door." His hand was shaking like a man with ague.

The girl was clinging to Amery.

"Don't let me go—don't let me go!" she begged, half mad with terror.

"Hush!" His voice was gentle and infinitely sweet. "I love you too dearly to have you hurt. You will remember that, won't you? The 'sinister man' loves you better than anything in life."

He dropped his head down to the white, upturned face, and their lips met, and in that moment of supreme happiness she forgot their dreadful surroundings, forgot the danger in which they stood, was conscious only of the glory which wrapped her as in a sheet of living flame. In another second the arm of the first man was about her and had lifted her bodily to the other side of the shed.

"You go quiet!" he hissed. "If you raise a scream, I'll bash your head in!"

Amery's eyes, baleful as a snake's, were on him, and, despite his commanding position, the man wilted.

Elsa was struggling to escape from the encircling arm. Her mouth was open to scream, when a big hand closed on her face.

"Help me with her!" snarled the man, and Dame was leaping across the pit, when exhausted nature took its toll, and Elsa lay inert in her captor's arms.

"She's fainted. Thank Heaven for that!" thought Amery, watching the girl with hungry eyes till the door closed on her, leaving him alone with one whom he judged to be his executioner.



## CHAPTER XLVII

### IN THE HOUSE OF DEATH

"Now, young fellow"—Dame was almost jocose—"you've got a very little time to live, and that time won't be so full of misery!"

He made no attempt to approach his victim. In one corner of the room was a large barrel, which he rolled near to the hole, and, knocking off the head, turned it over on its side.

A stream of gray dust poured forth, and, upending the barrel, he emptied it into a big heap. At the farther end of the shed was a tap and two pails, and Amery watched him, as he set the water running. In a little time Dame came back with the pails full and, making a hole in the center of the heap, poured water gently into the cavity, stirring it with a spade.

"I gather that you are the lord high executioner?" said Amery calmly.

In spite of the man's bravado he was trembling from head to foot.

"No, I'm not," he said. "That's nothing to do with me. I'm going to put you where you won't be found."

"A plasterer? I thought by your face you were a carpenter," said Amery.

"Who told you that? I was a carpenter. I don't want to talk to you."

He began plying the spade with vigor, throwing in shovelfuls of fine sand, and he mixed it until the heap was of the consistency of mortar. He paused to rest

on the heavy shovel, and, as he did so, the blanket curtain that covered the door bulged, and Amery turned his head to stare, unafraid, into the eyes of the man who hated him with a hatred that only death could end.

Bearded, tall, with a face still covered with motor goggles, the man called Stillman nodded pleasantly and smiled. And so perfect was the fitting of the beard that even the smile did not betray his disguise.

"Well, Amery, you'll be interested to learn that your chink is at this moment wishing he hadn't butted into our affairs."

"You surprise me," said Amery.

"He followed your cab—you didn't know that, did you? I'll give him credit; he's some runner! But we caught him at the end of Ladbroke Grove, and he's not the only man that can use a knife."

"So I understand," said Amery. "You are pretty useful that way, as poor old Maurice Tarn knew, if he knew anything. Queer—I thought you were driving the cab. What next?"

The bearded man lit a cigarette before he spoke.

"I? Oh, I do nothing. I am the interested spectator. The big man does the big work." He glanced down at the pit, and from the pit to the wet cement. "Dame and I are the first and second gravediggers—merely that."

"What are you going to do with the girl?"

The other shook his head, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

"I don't know. The big man has views about her. She knows a great deal more than is good for us. I suppose you realize that, Amery?"

"She knows nothing. She doesn't even know who I am."

The eyebrows of "Mr. Stillman" went up.

"You don't mean that you haven't confided that important particular? Bless my soul, I thought for your safety's sake you would have told her that you were the chief of the Foreign Office Intelligence Bureau for counteracting the drug traffic, and that they'd brought you over when poor old Bickerson had failed—and did this, moreover, after the thick-headed authorities had taken the trouble to send you to Shanghai, so that the story of your false disgrace could come to England and disarm suspicion. I admit you deceived me, but only for a little time. This is the finish, Amery! If I had my way, it would be the girl's finish, too. It is madness to fool around and leave her alive, but the big man thinks it is necessary, and I've annoyed him so much lately that I dare not protest."

Amery was feeling gingerly at the handcuffs. Once upon a time an Indian prisoner had mystified him by the ease with which he had freed himself from these manacles. A handful of rupees had bought his secret. He was wondering whether he had forgotten the trick. Suddenly Stillman walked toward him, took a strap from his pocket, and, stooping, buckled his feet together.

"It would be a thousand pities if our friend was hurt by a chance kick," he said.

Amery was trying hard to compress the bones of his right hand, as the Indian had taught him, and, with a sinking of heart, he realized the truth of the Indian's words: "Master, you must practice every day for this trick, or it can never be done."

"What is it to be—a hanging or a shooting?"

"Neither, I should imagine," said Stillman and glanced at Dame. The man looked sick with fright.

"You'd better go and look after the girl," he said.

"I'll wait for the boss—there he is now! Come back in a quarter of an hour. I don't think you need wait any longer."

Glad to escape, the bald-headed man staggered out of the shed.

"I hear nothing," said Amery, his ears strained.

"Feng Ho would have heard," said Stillman. "Here he is."

Again the blanket bulged, a faint click, as the door closed, a white, podgy hand appeared round the blanket, and there came into view the smiling face of Mr. Tupperwill, banker and purist.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### THE EXECUTIONER

THE large, fat face of Mr. Tupperwill was creased in an expression of pain and distaste. His mild eyes sought the prisoner's, held for a second, and then wandered to the deep pit and the heap of slaked mortar.

"Everything has been done as it should have been done," he commented. "It is such a relief to be able to depend upon one's friends! I dare say you yourself have suffered from the inefficiency of subordinates in little matters?"

Amery smiled contemptuously, but did not offer to speak. The silence in that room, with its deadened walls and draped ceiling, was so profound that he could hear the ticking of his watch.

"One likes to deal with dependable people, even in the trivial affairs of life." Mr. Tupperwill spoke earnestly. "'Trivial,' by the way, does come, as French suggests, from two Latin words, meaning the three crossroads where gossips meet."

Again his eyes sought Amery's.

"Theologians, great thinkers, metaphysicians, the brightest minds that science has known, have speculated upon what you so soon will know for certain, Major Amery!" he said, as he sighed heavily. "Is there an after life? Who knows? Is it possible that the theory of a future state was born of man's vanity and the preposterous assumption that such perfect creatures as we are, must, as a reward for our perfection, enjoy another existence which we deny to the common animals?"

As he was talking, he was fumbling in the pocket of his long frock coat, and, when his hand was withdrawn from the folds, it held a thick stick of irregular pattern. Amery recognized it immediately as the *sjambok* with which the banker had been struck down on the night he and his confederate had made their first attempt upon him, and when Tupperwill, in his anxiety, had incautiously come a little too close to the struggling man.

"This, I think, you know. It was taken from your study a few nights ago, when my friends visited your house, for purposes of—ah—inspection. That stain"—he pointed to the end—"is blood. It is my blood. Observe!"

He bent his head, so that Amery could see the angry scar his blow had left.

"My blood is very precious to me," he said, "and has an importance greater than any, as you will learn. With such a weapon as this," said Mr. Tupperwill in his even way, "it is possible to beat a man so that he is beyond recognition, to beat him until he dies. I dare say that, considering in your mind the mode of death that I had planned for you, various methods, such as shooting, killing, hanging, perhaps, or something equally painless, must have occurred to you? Even my friends in all probability pictured some such system."

He looked across to Stillman for confirmation. Stillman's attitude was curious. He seemed entirely under the spell of the stout man's eloquence, and he had neither eyes nor mind for the prisoner. He was gazing intently upon the banker, hanging on to every word he spoke, his lips moving, as though he were repeating, syllable by syllable, all that "the big man" said.

Tupperwill examined the chains and bolts, tested them by exerting all his strength, felt the handcuffs, the strap about the prisoner's feet, and, as if satisfied with his scru-

tiny, he stepped across the pit, and, laying down the stick, first placed a handkerchief on the floor, then, taking off his coat, folded and placed this carefully on the handkerchief. On the top of the coat he laid his shining silk hat, unfastened the heavy gold links about his shirt cuffs, and rolled them back until his big arms were revealed.

"You have the smock?" he asked pleasantly.

From where Amery stood he could not see the black coat that hung against the end wall.

"Such as butchers use," said Mr. Tupperwill, as he was helped into the long black garment that buttoned from chin to foot. He lifted the lantern and brought it nearer to the prisoner.

"I wish to see what I am doing," he said with a smile and wetted the palm of his hand. "You are going?"

"Yes, I'll go," said Stillman huskily.

The spell was broken; he could not stay and see what was to follow.

"Perhaps it is as well," said Tupperwill with great politeness. "Happily I am entirely without nerves. When in ten minutes you return, I shall have gone, and Mr. Dame and you will have little to do. Now, Major Amery, are you ready?"

The thud of the first blow came to Stillman's ears, as he hurriedly closed the door. He found Dame sitting in the kitchen before a half-emptied bottle of whisky. The man was looking ghastly, and he was almost in tears. When Stillman came in he asked:

"Well, is it over? Oh, my Lord! You heard what he said about being wakened up in the morning? Did you ever see an execution, Stillman?"

"Shut up, you fool!" growled the bearded man.

He looked back at the door through which he had come.

"I've a mind to stop it!" he said between his teeth, and Dame laughed hysterically.

"You dare not! He'd shoot you like a dog. You know him better than I do. Besides, we're both in it. What does it matter—one more or less?"

"He might have used the knife," growled the man. "It is butchery. Where's the girl?"

"In there." Mr. Dame nodded to a door leading from the kitchen. "That's the pantry. I've got a bed there. What are we to do with her?"

"Keep her."

"Here!" shrieked the horrified Dame. "She can't stay here! My daughter would find her."

"Then send your daughter away. You've any number of rooms. Dope her with that."

He banged a little bottle down on the table, and the other examined it stupidly.

"Did *he* get that?"

Stillman nodded.

"He thinks of everything," breathed Dame.

"Give her a few drops in her tea," said Stillman, "and she will give you no trouble. The rooms at the top of the house are furnished?"

Dame nodded.

"Put her there. What time do you expect that girl of yours home?"

"Not before two."

The bald man looked up at the noisy clock that was ticking above the mantelpiece.

"It's only twelve now. My word, only twelve, and it seems years! What is he going to do with her?"

"I don't know," impatiently. "He'll fix her tomorrow. She'll not give you any trouble, I tell you. She's quiet enough now."

He opened the door and peered in. There was no lamp in the pantry, but, by such light as the kitchen supplied, he saw a bed in one corner and a figure that lay motion-



less. Closing the door noiselessly, he came back to the brooding Dame. Their eyes went to the clock together.

"Ten minutes," said Dame. "You're going to help me?"

Stillman looked round sharply.

"That is not my business, Dame. Don't be a fool. There isn't ten minutes' work in it."

The other licked his dry lips.

"Suppose they trace him? This would be the first place they'd search. They'd see the floor was newly cemented."

"Who is going to trace him—the chink? You can ease your mind; the chink's dead. I settled him, myself. Look!"

The white cuff showing under the sleeve was dabbled red. Dame drew a long, sobbing breath.

"Oh, I wish I was out of it!"

"Don't let him hear you," warned the other, "or you'll be out of it in a way that you least expect!"

The clock ticked, but the hands did not seem to move. They sat dumbly, waiting for the minutes to pass. Ten eternal minutes went at last.

"Come, now, do your job," said Stillman.

The man did not move. Fifteen minutes, and then Stillman's hand fell on his shoulder, and he jumped up with a scream. Like a blind man, he staggered down the garden and stood for fully five minutes at the door of the garage, his heart thumping so that it seemed to choke him. At last, gritting his teeth, he pulled open the door. The candle had burned down to the socket; it spluttered, died, flared up, spluttered again, and then went out; but in that brief moment of light he saw the empty handcuffs and, out of the corner of his eye, a figure at the bottom of the pit.

The perspiration streamed down his face; he was sob-

bing hysterically, as, working like a madman, he shoveled the mortar into the pit and covered it with earth. At last it was level.

The rest must wait; he could not stay any longer in the dark, and, flinging open the door, he rushed up the garden, as though the gibing spirit of Paul Amery were at his elbow.

Stillman jumped up, as the white-faced man fell in, and, catching him as his knees gave way, he dropped him into a chair and poured out a glassful of neat whisky.

"Drink this, you fool," he said. "I've fixed a padlock; here is the key. Look after her, do you hear?"

The man nodded stupidly.

"You understand? She is to be taken upstairs and kept there; she must not be allowed to attract attention in any circumstances."

"Where are you going? Don't leave me alone," whined Dame, his teeth chattering.

"I'm off to find Tup and tell him that you've settled things. And I want to know what is going to happen to this girl. She's important, I tell you."

Another second, and Dame was alone—alone with his ghosts, his fears, the strange sounds of the night that nearly drove him mad, the sough of wind in the chimney, the patter of rain on the windows, and, above and through all, the consciousness of the dark secret that he must go out with the first light of dawn to hide finally.

He raised the glass to his lips and did not put it down until half its contents were drunk. Then, with a start, he remembered Amery's words, and, dropping his head into his arms, he sobbed like a frightened child.

## CHAPTER XLIX

### THE ESCAPE

ELSA knew she had fainted, knew this while she was unconscious—knew that something horrible had happened, and she groaned, as she turned on the hard bed. Her elbow came into contact with the wall, and the pain of the blow did much to bring her to complete consciousness. Her head was throbbing, and she felt a queer fluttering in her throat; when she tried to stand up, her knees gave way under her, and she fell back on the bed. And then, in a flood of terror, she remembered. Paul Amery was a prisoner, and they were going to kill him—and he loved her!

She struggled toward where four tiny circles gleamed in the darkness. They were holes cut into the pantry door, and through them she looked out upon a kitchen which at first she did not recognize. A man sprawled across the table, his head on his arms, an empty glass and a nearly empty bottle by his side. Mr. Dame!—Jessie's father.

She tried the door; it was fastened. Yet there was hope, for the man was fast asleep, and if she could only find a way of opening the door, escape was assured. She heard his deep snores and pressed with all her might; but, though the door gave slightly, her most strenuous efforts failed to wrench loose the fastening. She was weak, but, even if she had been stronger, it might have been a task beyond her strength to break the stout hasp. There was nothing to do but to wait, and waiting tortured her mind with thoughts of what would happen to the mar

in whose eyes she had seen such love and tenderness as she did not dream was in all the world.

The thought drove her frantic. Again she threw herself at the door, only to be hurled back bruised and hurt. And then she heard footsteps in the hall, and her heart stood still. There came the sound of feet on the stairs, and then silence. After a while she heard the intruder descend to the hall again, and a voice called:

"Father!"

It was Jessie Dame!

Was it possible that she was in league with these terrible men?

"Father, are you downstairs?"

The girl had evidently seen a light, for now Elsa could hear her coming down the passage toward the kitchen.

"Father, what is the matter?"

"Jessie, for Heaven's sake!"

At the sound of the terrified whisper, Jessie Dame spun round, ludicrous in her fear.

"Who is that?" she gasped.

"It is I—Elsa Marlowe."

"Where are you? Oh, how you frightened me!" whimpered the girl.

"Don't make a noise. I'm in here."

"In the pantry?" asked Jessie, gaping.

"Let me out, please."

Jessie Dame came slowly over, with a backward glance at the slumbering man.

"The padlock is fastened—he must have the key in his pocket. Did he put you here? Oh, my Heaven, he'll get into trouble! I knew he'd get into trouble!"

She tried to pull the lock loose.

"I'll go and find my key," she whispered and went out.

She seemed to have been away for an hour, though it could not have been many minutes before she returned

and, creeping on tiptoe to the door, tried key after key, till at last the rusty lock turned, and the girl came out into the kitchen, free.

At that moment Mr. Dame growled in his sleep and moved.

"Quick, quick!" hissed the frightened girl, pushing her companion into the passage. "He'll kill me if he finds I've done this!"

Even as they were mounting the stairs to the hall, the man awoke. One glance he gave at the open door, and then, with a yell that froze his daughter's blood, he came blundering out into the passage and up the stairs. Jessie was fumbling at the lock, her palsied fingers refusing to function, and Elsa thrust her aside. Just as Dame's head came level with the hall, the door was opened, and they fled out, slamming it behind them.

The street was in darkness. There was not a soul in sight as they fled toward the main road. Dame staggered in pursuit, roaring and screaming in a frenzy that was half drunkenness and half genuine fear of what would follow the girl's escape.

Glancing back, as she ran, Elsa saw that she was alone. Jessie Dame, who knew the neighborhood, had dived into a side turning, unnoticed by her father. The man had shaken off his stupor and was gaining.

And then, as the girl felt that she could not go another step farther, she saw a blessed sight. Crossing the road, visible in the street lamp, was a line of helmeted heads, and to her ears came the thud of tramping feet. The night patrols were returning from duty.

Into their very midst she ran, and a stout policeman caught her, as she fell into his arms. The night and its horrors faded in a swoon, from which she was not to recover till the morning sunlight fell across the hospital bed in which she lay.

## CHAPTER L

### THE MORNING AFTER

AT eleven o'clock the next morning Inspector Bickerson walked into the office of his superintendent and dropped wearily into a chair. Wille looked up from under his shaggy brows and demanded:

"Well?"

"Well enough for you, super," said Bickerson bitterly, "but for me it's been terrible. What with a lunatic girl's statements and frantic cock-and-bull stories about Soyoka, I haven't stood in one place from five o'clock this morning! According to the telephone message you sent me, the girl stated specifically that Amery was a prisoner, if he wasn't dead, at Dame's house. She's either mad or dreaming," said Bickerson decisively. "I was at Dame's house before eight o'clock. Evidently he had been drinking heavily, for he was still far from sober. I went to the garage, and I certainly was suspicious when I saw that there had been a hole in the center of the garage, and that it had been filled in. That looked almost as if Miss Marlowe's story was true. But I had it opened, every scrap of earth and cement taken up—fortunately, the cement hadn't had time to set—and not only was there no sign of a body but there never had been a body!"

"Marks of blood?"

"None. The floor had recently been washed, but Dame explained that by telling me that he'd had a clean out the night before. He explained the hole by telling me that he had been trying to dig a pit for his car, but, find-

ing himself encroaching on gas and drain lines, he wisely gave it up. My laborers found pipe lines six feet below the surface of the garage."

The superintendent consulted a memorandum.

"There were no blankets hanging on the walls to deaden the sound?"

"No, but there had been. I found a heap of blankets in a corner of the garage."

The superintendent leaned back in his chair.

"Isn't it queer Amery hasn't turned up?"

Bickerson shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I have stopped trying to keep a tag on Amery."

"And this other story"—Wille turned over a pile of papers and found a document—"this suggestion that the head of the Soyoka gang is Tupperwill? Have you seen him?"

"I've just come from him," said Bickerson. "His worst offense, from my point of view, is that he is a very loquacious and long-winded gentleman, whose mind is completely taken up with the questions of licensing hours and the need for introducing prohibition into working-class districts. I asked him point-blank what communication he had had with the Soyoka people, or if he knew anybody, or had any clients on his books who might be Soyoka's agents, and he gave me the impression that I was a harmless lunatic that needed humoring. He said he'd never heard of Soyoka, and I couldn't even get him to understand that he might be under suspicion of being Soyoka himself. I had the good luck to catch him just outside the bank; he had been spending the night at Brighton, he told me, and hadn't been home. When I told him I was a police officer, his chief concern seemed to be whether there had been a burglary at his house."

Superintendent Wille's frown was intensified.

"I don't understand it," he said. "There must be

something in the story. Here we have Amery's Chinese manager picked up, half dead, undoubtedly knifed, and that within a few hundred yards of Dame's house. By the way, how is the Chinaman?"

"The doctor says he's out of danger," said Bickerson, "and will be well in a few weeks. The fellow who stabbed him seems to have just missed touching a vital spot. I admit that *is* queer, and I wanted to interrogate Feng Ho, but the doctors will not allow him to be questioned for another day. I'm going round to see the girl, Miss Dame. Apparently she went to the office very early. Maybe I'll find friend Amery——"

"Who, you still think, is Soyoka?" asked Wille.

Bickerson shook his head.

"No," he admitted ruefully, "that was an error into which the cleverest man might fall, and I don't profess to be clever."

Bickerson walked eastward, a preoccupied and, as Superintendent Wille hoped, a chastened man. He found Jessie Dame in her tiny office, and it was not necessary that he should have made a close study of her to see that a remarkable change had come over her. Jessie Dame never had a good color, but now her complexion was a pale green, and her hollow eyes told of a sleepless night.

"Good morning, Miss Dame," said Bickerson. "What time did you get home last night?" And then, by way of explanation: "You know me—I'm Mr. Bickerson?"

"Yes, sir, I know you," she said quietly, avoiding his keen eyes. "I've seen you here before. I got home about one. I ought really to have stayed out till two, but I was so worried. I mean," she said, in some confusion. "I intended staying out later, but, owing to business troubles, I came home early."

"That almost sounds as though it weren't true," an-



swered Bickerson. "What were your business troubles?"

"Oh, the office, and the way Major Amery goes on, and all that sort of thing," said Jessie Dame desperately. "I can't explain."

"You left home early this morning? I was at your home before eight, but I did not see you."

"Yes, I came away very early."

In truth, Jessie Dame had walked the streets that night, and if she was lying now, it was in obedience to the urgent note that she had found waiting for her on her arrival at the office, giving her exact instructions as to what she was to say and ending with a horrific threat that chilled her blood to read.

"You didn't by chance find Miss Marlowe in your house, locked up in a cupboard?"

For a fraction of a second she struggled to find her voice.

"No, sir," she gulped at last, "and if Miss Marlowe says that I did, she is not telling the truth. I don't know what happened last night," said the girl. "I really don't know! I had one glass of wine, and it sort of went to my head."

"You heard nothing about Major Amery being locked up in your garage?"

The green turned to a sickly white. Jessie staggered back against the table.

"Major Amery?" she said hollowly. "Locked up in our garage? What do you mean?"

"I see, you know nothing about that. Didn't Miss Marlowe tell you?"

She was almost eager in her reply. It was such a relief to tell the truth.

"Major Amery isn't here this morning?"

She shook her head, not trusting her voice.

He strolled from her room into the little office usually occupied by Elsa, tried the door of Amery's room, and, finding it locked, walked back to Jessie Dame.

"Where is Miss Marlowe?" she asked jerkily.

"When I saw her last, she was at the West London Hospital."

"She—she's not hurt?"

"No, she's not hurt. The doctor thought she could go out to-day, but I doubt if she will."

He had hardly spoken the words before a light step sounded in the passage outside, and he had a fleeting glimpse of a dainty figure, as it passed the open doorway.

"That's she!" gasped Miss Dame.

"Miss Marlowe? Impossible!"

He went out and looked after her. Jessie Dame was right. Elsa was hanging up her hat and coat, as he walked in to her, marveling at the extraordinary reserves which women possess, that could enable her to appear after such a night as she had spent, bearing such little evidence of her ordeal. Save for the shadows beneath her eyes and the faintness of the pink in her cheeks, she seemed in no way changed.

She greeted him with a grave inclination of her head, and took off the typewriter cover with the assurance of one who expects to be called at any moment.

"Why did they let you out?" he demanded. "When I saw you this morning you seemed more dead than alive."

"I came out because I wanted to come," she said.

"That doesn't seem a very good reason. I suppose you know I've investigated your story?"

"I know; you've already told me."

"I've told you there was no body in the garage and no sign of murder. Otherwise, the particulars you supplied

correspond with the position of the building, and certainly there has been a hole in the floor."

She shivered.

"But, as I tell you, there was nothing in the pit but earth and drying cement. I think you must have dreamed this. Hadn't you visited Mr. Dame's house the day before?"

"Yes."

"Did you see anything there that suggested a pit to you?"

She looked at him, frowning.

"I——" she began. "Why, yes, I saw a man come out of the garage with a spade in his hand."

"Exactly!" he said triumphantly. "I don't know the name of the nervous disease from which you are suffering, but perhaps Doctor Hallam will tell you."

"I didn't imagine all I saw last night," she said in a low voice. "You were talking to Jessie Dame; she can confirm my story."

"On the contrary," said Bickerson, "that is just what she doesn't do! Miss Dame says she did not find you in a cupboard, or release you, or do any of the things which you said she did."

## CHAPTER LI

### THE BANK

For a moment Elsa stared at him incredulously, and then her face changed.

"Of course, poor girl! She's afraid of her father."

Mr. Bickerson threw out his hands in a hopeless gesture.

"I'd sooner have any kind of case than this," he said in despair. "A witness with illusions is a nightmare! I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I can't believe you. Major Amery hasn't come?"

"No, I don't think he's come," she said, ignoring the doubt he was throwing on her sanity. She tried the door. "Why, it's locked!"

"Was it locked last night?"

"I don't know. I left before him," she said slowly. Stooping, she looked through the keyhole.

"The key is not there. I think I can open it with the key of my door," she said, and this she did.

The office was exactly as Amery had left it. The cleaners had not been able to get in. A few cigarette ends lay in the grate and a half-burned cigar. She offered no further information, and, after a glance around, Bickerson walked out of the room, and she followed.

"He is a mysterious fellow," said the detective, "but not quite as——" He was at a loss for a word.

"'Sinister' is the expression you want," suggested the girl, with a faint smile.

"Yes, it is," he said in surprise. "No, he's not as

sinister as I thought he was. In fact——” He seemed on the point of telling her something, but changed his mind. “What is that book?” He pointed to a worn leather book that lay on her table.

“The night watchman’s report,” she said. “He brings it up every morning for Major Amery to see the names of people who may have called, or telephone calls and telegrams that have arrived after office hours.”

She opened the book, where the blotting paper marked the place, and checked an exclamation.

“Mr. Tupperwill came at ten minutes to six!”

For a moment she was so interested that she forgot her audience.

“Tupperwill came here?” he said incredulously and looked over her shoulder. “That is very queer.” He spoke half to himself. “I was with Mr. Tupperwill this morning, and he told me that he went home from his bank at five o’clock and never stirred out, until he decided, for no reason at all, to spend the night at Brighton, and he went down by the nine o’clock train.”

Later, after he had made a further round of calls, he reported by telephone to his chief.

“This case grows queerer and queerer,” he said. “I’ve just been talking to Mrs. Ralph Hallam, who tells me she was half killed last night by somebody who broke into the house. Who it was she doesn’t know, but the first person she saw, when she recovered consciousness, was Major Amery, and apparently he went out of the house with the girl—Miss Marlowe, I’m talking about.”

“That gives her story a support,” said the superintendent after a pause. “Was he alone?”

“No, his Chinese manager, Feng Ho, was with him, and apparently Doctor Hallam came soon after.”

“Is she related to Doctor Hallam?”

“His wife,” said Bickerson, “but she says he didn’t

leave the flat until long after Amery went. I've been round to see him, but he's not at home."

Another long pause.

"This case grows queer. Keep in touch with the office, Bickerson."

"I'll do something more than that," said the detective; "I'll watch that girl. There is something about the business that I do not like."

Whether she were watched or unwatched, Elsa Marlowe was indifferent. The hours passed with leaden feet; at every sound she started up; not once, but fifty times, did she open the door of Amery's room and peep in, hoping—praying, indeed—that he would come in his old, furtive way, and every time she looked she saw nothing but his chair and the blotting pad, and the bell above her head was silent.

He must have escaped—he must!

Weary as she was and reluctant to leave the office, for fear he should come in, she made a journey back to the hospital to inquire after the condition of Feng Ho; she was relieved to learn that he was so far out of danger that she might see him. Elsa was most anxious to learn all she could about his master, for she guessed that this little man would know far more about him, if he were free, than the best detective in the world.

Feng Ho looked up at her, as she came into the private ward, which he occupied alone, and greeted her with a grin.

"Perforations of thorax notwithstanding," he said faintly, "scientific bachelor will escape mortality on this occasion."

She read the question in his eyes and shook her head.

"I don't know. When did you see the major last?"

"Last night, young miss," he said gravely. "Has he not resumed appearance in commercial centers of the City of London?"

"No, Feng Ho," she answered quietly.

"Then Tupperwill knows."

"Mr. Tupperwill?"

He nodded. "Mr. Tupperwill is an extremely dangerous character, being connected with Nipponese Soyoka, purveyor of noxious and intoxicating drugs."

"But surely you're mistaken? Not Mr. Tupperwill?"

"Yes, young miss. The honorable major has distinct information. All errors are eliminated."

She could only gaze at him in stupefied wonder. That pleasant bore, engaged in a criminal conspiracy? It was impossible.

"Did you tell Mr. Bickerson?" she asked.

"Young miss, eminent detective policeman has not yet interrogated owing to reluctance of medical officials to risk elevation of temperature. Young miss"—his voice was a whisper—"you must exercise great care owing to absence of major. I desire you to call at major's house and instruct Chang to hasten to me. Give him explicit directions, remembering he is a poor, ignorant Chinaman, of dubious parentage and deplorable education."

He seemed so exhausted by this effort that she made no further attempt to question him, and, after exchanging a few words with the matron, she took a taxi to Brook Street.

The major's housekeeper had not had word of him, nor had his butler.

"Can I see the Chinese servant?"

"Yes, miss," said the housekeeper, "though he doesn't speak much English."

Whether he spoke English or not, the diminutive Chang understood all that she told him and took the address and the little map she had drawn, directing him to the hospital, shaking his head to indicate his understanding.

There was no fresh news at the office when she returned. Greatly daring, she had requested one of the submanagers to take Feng Ho's place, and she had deputed another to deal with the correspondence that ordinarily would have been seen by Amery, and she was now free to continue her investigations along the lines suggested by Feng Ho's monstrous and extraordinary charge concerning the banker.

She was sufficiently well acquainted with Mr. Tupperwill's habits to know that he would be at the bank until three o'clock, and she remained in the office just long enough to attend to an inquiry that had come through, and which the submanager could not deal with, and then she boarded a bus and went eastward. It took her some time to locate the court in which Stebbing's Bank was situated.

"Stebbing's?" said a policeman, looking at her queerly.

"Yes, it is round the first court to the left. You a depositor, Miss?" he asked with the fatherly familiarity of the City policeman.

"No," she smiled, "I haven't that fortune."

"You're lucky," he said cryptically.

She thought it was a piece of pleasantry, but she turned into the court and saw a small crowd standing before a closed doorway, on which had been pinned a notice. She looked up at the name—yes, it was the old-established Stebbing's. But why was the door closed at midday?

Pushing her way through the crowd, she read:



## STEBBING'S BANK.

The bank has temporarily suspended payment. Inquiries should be addressed to Slake & Stern, Solicitors, Bolt Street, E. C.

She drew clear of the crowd, bewildered, stupefied by the news. Poor Mr. Tupperwill! For the moment she forgot Feng Ho's wild charge and remembered only the kindness, the gentle inadequacy of the placid banker. And then she heard somebody speaking.

"——a man named Tupperwill—they say he laid his hands on all the money he could find and went to the Continent this morning by airplane."

## CHAPTER LII

### RALPH HALLAM'S COAT

THE failure of Stebbing's Bank was reported to the duty officer at Scotland Yard within five minutes of the notice being posted, and Superintendent Wille dispatched an orderly in search of Bickerson. That officer was taking an afternoon doze in his room, the blinds drawn, when the constable came for him, and he hurried to the bureau of his chief.

"Look at this," growled Wille, pushing the paper across the table.

Bickerson read and whistled.

"The City police closed the bank, from information evidently supplied by Major Amery overnight. There is a warrant out for Tupperwill and for the auditors, but Tupperwill seems to have skipped. What time did you see him?"

"At a little before eleven."

"Was he going into the bank? This report says that he hasn't been in the City to-day."

"I didn't actually see him go into the bank. I left him at the entrance of Tredgers Court, not doubting that he was on his way to his office."

"Did you notice anything unusual about him? Did he look worried?"

"No," replied Bickerson thoughtfully. "I thought it queer that he should have gone to Brighton on the previous night; that struck me as strange for a man of his settled habits. But there was nothing at all remarkable in his appearance or his manner."

The superintendent read the paper again. It contained a very full description of the wanted man. Then he rang the bell for his clerk.

"Circulate this description to all ports and railway stations, for detention and report. Get Croydon and find if he has left by airplane—that is the City police theory. Notify C. Divisional Office that his house is to be occupied until further orders. That will do."

"We must wait now," said Wille, when they were alone, "until we get the report on which the City police acted. But in the meantime you'd better round up Tupperwill's friends. Do you know any?"

Bickerson considered. "I've an idea that Hallam was one. If he wasn't a friend, they were certainly on dining terms, and Hallam was a depositor at the bank."

"The doctor?"

Bickerson nodded.

"Go along and see Hallam," said Superintendent Wille. "You may learn something about Tupperwill's other friends. Get a line on Stillman. I've heard only the faintest rumor about this gentleman, but he was evidently a client. From the phone talk I've had with the chief of the City police, it seems that Stillman is one of the persons who are wanted in connection with the bank failure. He was evidently a man closely in the confidence of Tupperwill, and I've got a hunch that Hallam may be able to put you on to this person. Report here as soon as you're through. I'm having a consultation with the commissioner this afternoon about Miss Marlowe's story."

"Do you think Stillman is Hallam?" asked Bickerson bluntly.

"I don't know. I have no very definite theory. At any rate, I shall have a clearer idea after you have seen the doctor."

Ralph's servant admitted the detective. His master was upstairs, dressing, he said.

"A late bird, eh?" asked Bickerson, in the friendly tone that has been the undoing of so many innocent and talkative servants.

"Yes, sir, he was rather late; he was out at a dance last night."

"Tell him I'm here."

He had been shown into the study at the back of the house, a small and comfortably fitted room. The windows were open, for it was a mild day, and a window box, filled with golden daffodils, caught the early afternoon sunlight.

Bickerson strolled to one of the bookshelves and scanned the titles aimlessly. Then his inquisitive eyes roamed systematically around the apartment. Evidently Ralph had partly changed his clothes in the room, where he had returned in the early hours of the morning. His overcoat was thrown over the back of a chair, and one buttoned dress shoe was under the table, the other being beneath the chair and hidden by the hanging coat. Without hesitation Bickerson picked up the coat, slipped his hand into one of the pockets, found it empty, and tried the other. And then something attracted his attention, and he carried the coat to the light. One of the sleeves was caked hard with some liquid which had been spilled upon it. He turned back the cuff, and the lighter lining showed a rusty, red stain.

Blood! He tried the other sleeve. Here the stain was larger and extended from the cuff halfway up the inner part of the arm. He picked up one of the shoes and whistled softly. It was spattered with stains, and when he scraped them his fingers were covered with dark red dust.

He heard Ralph descending the stairs, and he put down the shoes and waited.

"Good morning, Bickerson." Hallam's voice was expressionless, his face a mask. Instantly his eyes had fallen upon the coat and the boots, and he was waiting.

"Good morning, Doctor. I've called to make a few inquiries about Tupperwill. Do you know the bank has failed?"

Hallam expressed no surprise. "I didn't know. When did this happen?"

"This morning. Tupperwill has left hurriedly. You knew him very well?"

"Fairly well," said Hallam.

"Have you any idea where he is likely to be?"

"Not the slightest," said the other calmly. "I know Tupperwill only in his home. If he is not there, I haven't the slightest idea where he is to be found."

"You don't know where Major Amery happens to be?"

The ghost of a smile hovered at the corners of Hallam's set lips.

"He also is an individual who seldom took me into his confidence. Has he disappeared?"

"He has very much disappeared," said Bickerson, and, stooping slowly, picked up the coat. "Had an accident last night, didn't you?"

"You mean the blood on the sleeves?" said Hallam coolly. "There's some on the cuff, too."

"Did you cut your finger or something?" asked the detective sardonically.

Hallam laughed. "How absurd! A cut finger wouldn't make that stain."

"What would?" asked Bickerson sternly.

"Well"—Ralph chose his words carefully—"picking up a wounded Chinaman, who had been knifed by some

person or persons unknown, might make a mess of a man's sleeve."

Bickerson was staggered. "Was it you who found Feng Ho?" he asked.

Hallam nodded. "I was one of those who assisted him to the hospital."

Their eyes met.

"The police of the Hammersmith division made no reference to your being present when Feng Ho was found."

"They must have overlooked me," said the other lightly. "And, really, I feel so insignificant in the presence of police officers that I don't wonder! The truth is, Bickerson, I was looking for Amery—Feng Ho and I. He left Herbert Mansions suddenly, and, as his servant believed, was kidnaped with Miss Marlowe, who, I am happy to learn, is safe."

"Who told you that?" asked the detective sharply.

"I telephoned this morning, because I saw something in the evening paper about a young lady who was found wandering in Kensington."

"You tell that story, too, do you, about them being taken away? It is an extraordinary case. Presumably you will be able to account for every minute of your movements last night?"

"Almost every minute," said the other.

"What time did you return home this morning?" asked Bickerson.

Ralph hesitated.

"Whatever time my servant said I came is about accurate," he said. "Some time near four—it may have been a little later. As for Tupperwill, if that is really the object of your coming, I am absolutely unable to give you any information. I know nothing about him, except that I have an overdraft at his bank, and that I've

dined with him once or twice. Of his habits and his inner life I know less than you."

He expected Bickerson to return to the question of the bloodstained coat, but, to his relief, the detective made no further reference and left shortly after. He did not report immediately to Wille, but, going to his own room, got the Kensington police on the telephone.

"Who found the Chinaman?" he asked.

"Constable Simmons. He was on patrol duty and heard a groan in a garden. Going in, he found the man and had him taken to the hospital in an automobile that happened to be passing."

"No other person assisted?" asked the interested Bickerson. "Nobody named Hallam?"

"Oh, no, there was no question about the facts," said the voice of the sergeant on duty. "Simmons and the driver of the car were the only people concerned."

"Thank you," said Bickerson and put the telephone back. "Doctor Hallam," he said softly, "you are a liar. And if you're not something else, I'm very much mistaken!"

## CHAPTER LIII

### DAME PASSES

BICKERSON's interview with Wille was short enough. Wille and the commissioner had discussed Elsa's story, and they had decided that further investigation was necessary.

"See Dame and arrest him. You'd better report to the local division; they will send a man with you," were his instructions.

Jessie Dame went home very early that afternoon, in response to the instructions she had had from her father that morning. She was sick with fright, as she slowly mounted the steps of that fateful house and rang the bell. Dame opened the door himself, and at first she did not recognize him. His yellow mustache had vanished, and she stared into the face of a stranger instead of the familiar visage of "pater."

"Come in," he growled. "You—you've got me into a mess, you and that—— And you've got to get me out!"

"Is anything wrong, father?" she asked, trembling.

"Wrong!" he roared. "Wrong!"

There was no need to ask. His face betrayed the seriousness of the crisis. He almost dragged her into the dining room. On the table she saw his grip, packed and strapped.

"I'm leaving London at once," he said.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm likely to tell you that, ain't I?" he almost howled



at her. "Here is some money." He threw a handful of notes on the table. "Go to a boarding house and keep quiet. When I'm ready I'll send for you, and you'll come. You understand? You'll tell nobody where I am, if I ever do send for you."

"But, father, what is wrong? Is it serious? Is it about Miss Marlowe?" she whimpered.

"Never mind what it's about; that is nothing to do with you. I'm going at once. If anybody comes, you're to say that you expect me back to-night. And, if you tell them that I've taken my mustache off, I'll murder you! You can sell the furniture and keep the money, in case I want it. And——"

There came a sharp tap at the door, and he ran to the window, pulled aside the blinds, and staggered back.

"Two dicks," he said huskily, "Bickerson and another man."

Again came the knock.

"I'll go down to the kitchen. Tell them I'm out," he said and tiptoed down the stairs.

With a fainting heart the girl opened the door and stammered the message.

"He's out, is he?" said Bickerson good-humoredly. "Come, come, Miss Dame, you oughtn't to tell those kind of stories. I want to see him for a few minutes."

"He's gone out, really, Mr. Bickerson," said the girl, half fainting with fear.

Bickerson pushed his way past her, walked into the dining room and saw the grip on the table.

"Just wait here"—he was speaking to the other man—"I think I can find my way to the kitchen. You watch the stairs."

She stood, petrified with terror, as she heard the kitchen door open. Instantly came the deafening sound of an explosion.

"Here, quick!" shouted Bickerson, and the second detective flew down the stairs into the kitchen.

The bald man lay in a huddled heap on the floor, and within reach of his hand was a revolver, the barrel of which was still smoking.

"Get busy on the phone—there is one here. Call an ambulance and the divisional surgeon, though I don't think he'll be much use. And keep that girl out!" he said sharply.

There was little need to tell Jessie what had happened. With a wild scream she flew toward the open door, but the detective caught her in his arms and carried the struggling girl back to the dining room.

By the time the police surgeon and the ambulance arrived, Bickerson had made a very thorough search of the man's clothes, and the kitchen table was strewn with the articles he had removed.

"He's dead," said the surgeon. "Suicide—in fear of arrest, I presume?"

Bickerson nodded.

"I hardly saw it happen," he said. "Not having been able to question the girl, I don't know what occurred, but I guess that he saw us from the window of the dining room. I noticed the blind move." He thought a moment. "It was a lucky shot for that poor, howling female," he added.

Elsa read the news in the late editions of the evening papers. She was inured to shock, and, save that her sympathetic heart softened toward the poor girl who had saved her from untold horrors, she had no feeling except an almost savage satisfaction that the man who was in some way responsible for Paul Amery's suffering had gone to his account.

She dare not let her mind rest upon the sinister man and his fate. Again and again she told herself that he

was alive. She sat at her table, her hands clasped before her, praying, praying that the bell might ring, and that his sharp voice might call her in to him; and it was only when the evening came, and she found herself alone in the building, that for the first time she broke down and gave way to a flood of passionate weeping.

Her head was aching; her eyes hot and painful; misery was coiled about her heart until it was a pain to breathe; but at last she flung off her sorrow and, bathing her face, went out, not knowing whither and caring nothing.

"Elsa!"

As she reached the street a familiar voice called her, and she turned. Ralph Hallam was standing on the sidewalk, his debonair self.

"I am not going back to Herbert Mansions, Doctor Hallam," she said quietly.

"I know," he nodded. "I've taken a room for you at the Palace. Lou has sent your things there."

The girl hesitated. She had come to regard Ralph Hallam in the light of an enemy. That he hated Amery, she knew, and it almost hurt her to accept even this slight service at his hands.

"Thank you," she said simply, and then: "You've heard about Jessie's father?"

"Dame? Yes. He was mixed up in a scandal of some kind, and he shot himself when the police went to arrest him."

She walked slowly down Wood Street, and he kept pace at her side, well aware that his presence was objectionable to her.

"I'm afraid you think I am a pretty bad egg," he said.

"I don't know whether you are or not," she answered listlessly. "I'm really beyond caring."

"You don't trust me, at any rate."

"Why should I?" she asked quietly.

"Will you do me one favor?"

She stopped and looked at him, suspicion lurking in her eyes.

"Will you come to Half Moon Street and let me tell you the whole truth—the truth about myself and the truth that I have recently learned about Amery?"

She knew the truth about Amery—that he loved her! That was the vital, triumphant truth that eclipsed and obliterated all others.

"I would much rather not," she said. "Besides, there is nothing for me to know about Major Amery. He has already told me."

"Do you know that Amery was a detective—is a detective, I mean?" he added hastily, and, seeing that he had startled her, he went on: "Amery is on the staff of the Foreign Office Intelligence Department, and he was brought from India to cope with the drug traffic. I never guessed he was working with Bickerson, but he is. Feng Ho told me last night. They say he is the cleverest intelligence officer that has ever served in India. He has been fighting out there with Soyoka's crowd, and his agents have been everywhere. Sometimes they pretended to be working for one of the gangs, like that man Moropoulos, the Greek, who was a detective from Washington. He has strangled my business; half the crowd I've been working with are under arrest, and I expect to be arrested at any moment. It was Amery who put the police into Stebbing's Bank. Tupperwill was Soyoka's principal agent; he made a fortune out of dope, but Amery has finished him! Elsa, I don't know what is going to happen to me, and I may never be able to ask you again to dine. Lou will be there."

Again she hesitated.

"I'll come," she said, "but I must first go to the hotel and unpack."

"You can do that later," he urged.

There was something in his eagerness which she did not understand, and which did not quite fit in with his frankness.

"I will go with you, but I won't stay late. I have a feeling that I'm being a fool, but I'll take the risk."

She did not see the smile that flitted across his face, as he helped her into the taxi, but she noticed that he was most anxious to entertain her on the journey to the house, and he hardly stopped speaking once.

"Tupperwill, for some reason, wanted to hold you, I think as a hostage. It may have been just fondness for you, and it may have been a knowledge of Amery's mind. He called you out one afternoon, didn't he, to meet him?"

"Yes," she said, in surprise.

"But he asked you first whether Major Amery was out? He said you were to come at once, but you met Amery before you left, and you told him where you were going? Tupperwill had a great little scheme for kidnaping you. The car was to drive into a yard at Islington, and you were to be taken out and held till the night, when you were to be removed somewhere else. But, just before the car turned into the gate, you happened to mention the fact that Amery knew, and he changed his plans. Do you remember?"

Then that was the explanation! And Feng Ho must have been following her! Only now was she beginning to realize the care with which the sinister man had surrounded her, and at the thought of him her lips trembled. It was just then they reached Half Moon Street. He jumped out first. As she stepped from the cab, the door opened, and he almost rushed her into the house. She couldn't understand his haste.

## CHAPTER LIV

### WILLE SAYS "NO!"

By nature Superintendent Wille was a skeptical and unbelieving man. In nine cases out of ten he had found, in the course of a long and interesting life, that his suspicions were justified; and now, as he presided over a conference of minor officials of Scotland Yard, he enlarged upon the creed of disbelief.

"That girl told the truth, Bickerson," he said definitely. "If it was not the truth, why did Dame commit suicide the moment you went to arrest him? And if she told the truth in one particular, she told the truth in another. We have had the statement of Hallam, that he and the Chinaman went in pursuit of the cab which carried away Major Amery and Miss Marlowe. In confirmation, we have Feng Ho struck down in the open street, probably in the act of pursuit; and now we have the suicide of Dame."

"But the girl Dame said——" began Bickerson.

"I'm not taking much notice of what the daughter said. It was her duty to lie on behalf of her father, and well you guessed she was lying!"

Bickerson could do no more than agree.

"The garage, the pit, the threat of murder, the abduction—they all hang together," Wille went on deliberately, "and the fact that there is no body in the pit proves nothing, except that no murder was committed in the shed. It does not prove that it was not committed elsewhere, or that Dame was not privy to the act. We have Dame's record; he was a man with three con-

victions, and ex-convicts of his mental caliber do not commit suicide to avoid Dartmoor, but to keep their feet off the sliding trap of Pentonville. Therefore, I argue that there has been a murder somewhere. What is the time?" He looked at his watch. "Half past nine. Do you know where Miss Marlowe is to be found?"

"I believe she's staying at Herbert Mansions," said Bickerson.

"Go along and bring her back here. We will have her story tested in the light of our subsequent discoveries. You boys can hang on," he said to the little knot of detectives, major and minor.

At Herbert Mansions, Bickerson interviewed Mrs. Hallam.

"No, she's not here," said that self-possessed lady. "As a matter of fact, my husband took a room for her at the Palace Hotel, and all her trunks were sent there this afternoon."

This statement Bickerson confirmed. The trunks and bags had arrived and had been sent up to Miss Marlowe's room, but she herself had not arrived.

"You're sure?"

"Yes, sir," said the reception clerk. "Miss Marlowe hasn't taken her key yet," and he lifted it down from the hook behind him.

To make absolutely certain, a page was sent to the room and returned with the news that it was not occupied.

"She couldn't very well come in without our knowledge," said the clerk.

Bickerson was more disturbed than Superintendent Wille would have imagined. He remembered there was a night watchman at Amery's office, and he got in touch with him at once by telephone.

"Miss Marlowe left the office rather late, sir—nearly seven o'clock, I think."

"Did she go alone?"

"No, sir; Doctor Hallam was with her. He had been waiting outside the door for the best part of two hours."

He did not call up Ralph, preferring to make a personal visit. It was a long time before his knock procured attention. He saw a light appear in the passage, and Ralph opened the door to him.

"Hello! What do you want this time?" he asked cheerfully. "Are you taking me for knifing the Chinaman?"

"We'll discuss the Chinaman at another time," said Bickerson coldly, "and then I shall ask you to explain why you lied to me about finding him and taking him to the hospital. At the moment, I want to know something about Miss Elsa Marlowe, with whom, I understand, you were seen at seven o'clock this evening."

"Which is perfectly true," admitted Ralph. "I called for her at the office; in fact, I waited there some time for her."

"And then?" asked Bickerson.

"Then I drove her to Notting Hill. She was going to call on the girl Dame."

"Are you sure you didn't bring her here?"

"Perfectly sure," said Ralph coolly. "Miss Marlowe hasn't been in this house in weeks. My servant is out, or he would support my statement that I returned alone."

His eyes did not waver under the detective's gaze.

"She was seen coming in here," he bluffed.

"Then whoever saw her suffers from illusions," replied Ralph. "I tell you she has not been inside this house. She is probably at the Palace Hotel, where I took a room on her behalf."

With this story, Bickerson had to return to his chief.



"She's not at Dame's house," said Wille decisively. "The police are in possession, and Miss Dame has been taken to the home of some very distant relative."

They looked at one another.

"I don't like it," said the superintendent. "Whoever was responsible for getting the girl away last night is taking care of her to-night. Warn all stations, with a full description; patrolmen to be notified that the girl must be detained wherever and whenever she is found. At nine o'clock to-morrow morning all officers concerned in the case will meet at Dame's house. I am going through that establishment with a fine comb!"

Bickerson went back to his office, leaving the shrewd old superintendent to make another examination of the papers and money that had been found on Dame's body. He was so engaged when the door was pushed open, and Bickerson came in.

"Can I have a warrant to search Hallam's house?" he asked.

"No, you can't," grunted the superintendent without looking up, and Inspector Bickerson stared at him.

## CHAPTER LV

### MASTER OF THE SITUATION

It was not the fact that he almost pushed her into the house, but the quickness with which Ralph turned, locked the front door, and put the key in his pocket, which brought the girl round in alarm.

"Why did you do that?" she asked.

"I have my reasons," replied the man.

He was deadly cool. Remembering how easy it had been to arouse his anger or reduce him to a condition of helpless embarrassment, she could only wonder what had produced the change of attitude.

"Where is Mrs. Hallam?"

"At Herbert Mansions, so far as I know," said Hallam, without shame. "In fact, Elsa, I've deceived you. I wanted you here for another purpose than to discuss my iniquities. The night isn't long enough, anyway, to give you a detailed account of my numerous falls from grace."

The dining table was laid for two, but she did not attempt to sit down. She turned toward the door.

"I don't think I'll stay," she said.

"I, on the other hand, am certain that you will," he replied, "and I will tell you why."

He beckoned her out of the room and pushed open the door of the library. The writing table had been cleared of the things which ordinarily littered the cloth. Instead, there was a typewriter, also a thick pad of paper and a cardboard package of carbons.

"You will spend the rest of this evening in making a very detailed statement about my connection with the amateurs, my knowledge of Soyoka, and a few other particulars with which I will not bother you for the moment. After——"

"After?" she repeated, when he paused.

"You shall please yourself whether you stay or whether you go. Elsa, there are certain things in this house that no man or woman has ever seen, important things that Bickerson, at any rate, would give his head to see with his own eyes. In a few days I am leaving England and starting afresh—under another name, of course"—he smiled—"in spite of the failure of Stebbing's Bank. My friend Mr. Tupperwill has disappeared, as you probably know. His present location is a mystery. I can assure you, my dear Elsa, that his disappearance has made no difference to me."

The smile faded from his face, and he looked at her moodily for a long time, and then:

"Elsa, I wanted you once—wanted you very badly. And maybe it's going to take a long time for you to forgive my wanting. But somebody wants you more than I—somebody who will not be denied."

He waited for her to speak, but her lips were closed firmly.

"Come," he said suddenly and took her by the arm. She struggled to free herself.

"Let me go—for Heaven's sake, let me go, Ralph!"

"I can't. I swear that you shall not be hurt!"

Weakened as she was, the grip about her arm was too powerful to be shaken off, and she went with him up the stairs, scarcely knowing what she was doing.

"This is your room," he pointed. "And this"—he turned the handle of the second door which led, as she

knew, to his small drawing-room—"is the hiding place of a gentleman who, I regret to say, is for the moment master of the situation."

She shrank back, as he opened the door, but he pushed her in.

"Here is your lady," he said, and pulled the door tight.

## CHAPTER LVI

### THE PIT

AT nine o'clock in the morning a small knot of plain-clothes police passed into the Dames' house and filed into the dining room. Superintendent Wille was the last to arrive, and with him were two men in laborers' clothing, carrying spades.

Bickerson, who had been in the place half an hour and had already completed his search of the upper rooms, came down at the sound of voices and joined the party.

"You have found nothing?" asked Wille.

"Nothing whatever, except a number of old clothes and evidence that the place has been used as a sort of headquarters by Dame's crowd."

Wille led the way down into the kitchen. The dark stains of Dame's blood still showed on the floor, but Wille had a less morbid interest in the place.

"There is the pantry, exactly as the girl described it," he said, and pulled open the door. "And there is the bed."

He examined the door again, tried the hasp, and picked up from the floor a padlock, in which was a key; from the key hung a ring with many others.

"I agree that Miss Marlowe's story has plenty of corroboration," said Bickerson, a little crestfallen. "In fact, I don't think I've handled this case as well as I might."

"As you had other matters on hand, you couldn't be

expected to," said the superintendent gruffly. "I'm not pretending that the case was easy. It wasn't."

He opened the door leading into the garden and stepped out.

"There is the shed at the bottom of the garden. Have you got the key?"

Bickerson nodded and pulled out two keys tied with red tape. Wille, taking them from his hand, walked down the path and, swinging open the heavy door, stepped inside. He looked down at the earth-filled break in the concrete floor and then at the walls.

"And there is the ring bolt," he said. "You saw that? You remember how Miss Marlowe in her statement described the bolt through which a chain was drawn?" He stopped suddenly and touched the wall above the place where the ring protruded. "Do you see those?"

There were four pear-shaped stains on the brick wall.

"They may be blood, or they may not. Look, there are others on the floor!"

He went and called the laborers.

"Open up that hole," he said, "and dig down until you can dig no deeper."

They strolled out into the garden, while the men began their work.

"Do you think Amery is dead?" asked Bickerson.

"I thought so yesterday; I'm not so sure to-day," was the superintendent's reply, and then: "Did you have this pit thoroughly cleared?"

"Absolutely. I went down as far as the pipes."

"What time did you do this?"

"Early yesterday morning, about eight o'clock."

"And you found nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

"Did you fill in the pit afterward?"

"Yes," said Bickerson; "why?"

"And you locked both doors? Are there any other keys?"

"So far as I know, there aren't, but probably there are."

"You should have sealed the doors," grumbled Wille.

"There is a body here, sir," said one of the laborers coming up to them.

They were crowding round the doorway to look in at the dreadful sight, when Bickerson, turning his head, saw a man coming out of the kitchen—a tall, lean man, with a white bandage about his dark forehead and a queer, cynical smile on his thin lips.

"Amery!" he gasped.

Amery did not answer until he came up to the staring group, and then he said:

"Have you found the body?"

Wille nodded.

"I was afraid you had," said Amery. "It is Tupperwill. I killed him!"

Amery paused, while his startled audience gasped their horror.

"It was an accident. He had me chained up to the wall and had given me one blow, when I managed to get my hands clear of the handcuffs, and I struck back at him. Again, by a lucky chance, his infernal stick caught me and almost knocked me out. If I had fallen then, it would not have been Tupperwill's body you would be finding! By the greatest good luck I caught him on the point and knocked him backward. His head caught the edge of the pit, and he crumpled up and fell."

A long and a painful pause.

"I hope he was dead," he said softly. "I hope he was dead!"

And they knew that he was thinking of another dreadful possibility.

"You have made a very serious statement, Major Amery," said Bickerson. "You may be able to explain——"

"I'm making another. Put up your hands, Stillman. Put 'em up!"

Bickerson's hands went up; his face had the pallor of death.

"You'll find in his inside waistcoat pocket a most perfectly constructed beard. At the European Bank in Threadneedle Street, superintendent, you will discover a balance in his name that will stagger you. Crook from the day he put on uniform, to the culmination of his career, when he succeeded in joining the Soyoka gang, there isn't a straight place in his life."

A pair of handcuffs snapped about the detective's wrists, and two of his former comrades hurried him through the house into the car that was waiting.

Wille took the arm of the sinister man, and together they walked out of earshot.

"I got your message last night. How did you finally escape?"

"I mightn't have got away at all, for Bickerson was somewhere in the garden, and I was as weak as a rat from loss of blood. Fortunately, I managed to get the door open that led into the lane, but even here Stillman might have finished what the other devil began, only there was somebody waiting for me, the last person in the world I expected to find."

"Not Hallam?" gasped Wille.

"Hallam it was," said the major, with a little wince of pain. "There is another kind of crook. He got me out of the lane, took me home, put me to bed and dressed the injury. There's this excuse for his being a crook, that he's a pretty bad surgeon! But he was good to



me, and he did it all without any hope that he would escape the consequence of his own misdoings."

"Then Bickerson killed Tarn?" said Wille.

"Who else? It could only be Bickerson or Hallam. Tarn had got a telegram, which came to my office in error. It was from a man who used to be one of Tarn's agents. In the course of that wire the sender was indiscreet enough to mention the name of Tupperwill. Now, here is the curious thing about the Tarn murder: Hallam was scared to death that Tarn intended betraying his crowd, and he got to know that the old man had an appointment that night with Bickerson. In order to stop him talking, knowing something of his habits, he doped the old man's brandy, thinking that that would carry him over till the next morning and make his confession impossible.

"To make absolutely sure, he called on Bickerson and found that the inspector was on the point of going to his appointment. Now, Bickerson knew that Maurice Tarn was engaged in the dope trade, but I doubt then, if he had any intention of injuring him, until he learned by telephone that Tarn knew the head of the Soyoka gang. He allowed Hallam to go with him, so that, in the event of any trouble, the blame could be shifted. By an extraordinary coincidence, my man Feng Ho had gone into the house that night to make an examination, and he switched out the lights in order to test the old man's wakefulness, so that, when they went into the study, all the circumstances were favorable to the commission of the crime. In the darkness Bickerson leaned down, felt for the heart, and drove the knife home. The blood on his hands could easily be accounted for—he was the only man who had handled the body.

"Two factors occurred to frighten him. The first

was the presence in the room of Miss Marlowe, and the second the intrusion of Feng Ho."

"Humph!" said the police chief. "It's a pity Dame committed suicide——"

"Dame was murdered," was the calm reply. "He was shot down by Bickerson, as he entered the kitchen—and for an excellent reason! Dame at a critical moment broke down."

"Did Bickerson know that Tupperwill was dead?"

The major shook his head.

"No," he said quietly, "that was the one shock that Mr. Bickerson had—that Tupperwill, and not I, lay in the grave that he had so carefully dug. But he knew that Tupperwill had disappeared, and he was scared. That was why he invented the story of having seen the banker.

"There is one favor I have to ask: it is that a suit case, which you will find in Bickerson's lodgings, should be handed to me intact. I'll tell you frankly that it contains money earned by Tarn and Hallam in the course of their nefarious practice, and I suggest that the money be passed along, because, if it comes to a matter of law, there are going to be a whole lot of complications which would be best avoided."

"What will you do with Hallam? There's a warrant out for him."

"I don't think I should execute the warrant, if I were you," said Amery quietly. "I learned last night one curious thing: Tupperwill, who must have known that Maurice Tarn's money had disappeared, tried to work on Hallam's feelings by telling him that I had the money in a box at Stebbing's Bank. He hoped to induce the doctor to go after me; for Tupperwill and Bickerson knew me for what I was. As to Hallam—

the two gangs are broken, and, unless I am mistaken, by this time Bickerson is dead."

"Dead!" cried the superintendent.

"He carried cyanide tablets loose in his waistcoat pocket," said Amery, "and if he is an intelligent man he will find them before he is searched.

"And now," he said, looking at his watch, "I am going back to my neglected business. I am out of police work for good. From henceforward point to me as a rising City merchant."

It was a glorious morning, and, as his cab carried him back slowly through the tangle of City traffic, his thoughts were far away from death and danger, from that hideous night in the Dames' garage, from the pit and the thing that went down to it. His work was done, the labor of years finished. There might be a trial; there would certainly be an inquest, and he would figure as part of a nine-days' wonder. But after that there was work and a serene future and a girl into whose soul he had looked.

Ralph Hallam was waiting for him when he arrived.

"Well, was it as you thought?"

Amery nodded.

"Now what of me?"

"Come to my house to-night," said Amery. "I will give you part of the contents of the suit case, unless friend Wille changes his mind. The remainder I purpose sending to a charity. Miss Marlowe did not come with you?"

"No, Lou told me she was asleep."

Amery bit his lip.

"It was good of your wife to stay with Elsa last night. By the way, are you going to your unknown destination alone?"

Ralph scratched his chin.

"N-no," he said. "I think I shall make a desperate attempt to be respectable. Lou isn't exactly an inspiration, but she's a warning!"

He was scarcely out of Wood Street and had crossed Cheapside, when he saw the girl go up the street and pass between the ancient portals.

Of a truth this was a day of wonder and magic to Elsa Marlowe; for in the darkness of the night, in a room where she had expected terror, she had met the face of her dreams, and heard a voice, beloved over all, and had felt the strength of the enfolding arms.

The sky above was blue, flecked by clouds as fine and white as the veil of a bride. She came into her office, hung up her hat, and prepared the typewriter for a joyous day. And then, before she could sit down, the bell rang.

Her heart was beating at a tremendous rate, as she turned the handle and went in.

"Do you want anything, Major Amery?" she asked breathlessly.

"I want you to kiss me," he said.

She stooped over him; their lips met.

"Take this," he said, in that old, gruff tone of his, and with a little laugh she sat down and opened her book. The trembling pencil was making lines of its own, when he began:

"TO THE MANAGER OF THE MONTE ROSA HOTEL, COMO,  
ITALY.

DEAR SIR: In a month's time I am bringing my wife to Como, and I should be glad if you would reserve me a suite!"

THE END

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Money For One. Berta Ruck.  
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Murder by the Clock. Rufus King.  
Murder Club, The. Howel Evans.  
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Mystery of Angelina Froom. R. Austin Freeman.  
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Mystery of the Barren Lands, The. Ridgwell Cullum.  
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Needle's Kiss, The. Austin J. Small.  
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Nick of the Woods. Robert Montgomery Bird.  
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Night of the Wedding. C. N. and A. M. Williamson.  
Night Operator, The. Frank L. Packard.  
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Nina. Susan Ertz.  
Nine Unknown, The. Talbot Mundy.  
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Nobody's Man. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
No Defence. Gilbert Parker.  
Nora Pays. Lucille Van Slyke.  
Northing Tramp, The. Edgar Wallace.  
North. James B. Hendryx.  
North Star. Rufus King.  
Now East, Now West. Susan Ertz.  
No. 17. J. Jefferson Farjeon.

Oak and Iron. James B. Hendryx.  
Obstacle Race, The. Ethel M. Dell.  
Octagon House. Gertrude Knevels.  
Odds, and Other Stories. Ethel M. Dell.  
Officer. Hulbert Footner.  
Old Father of Waters. Alan LeMay.  
Old Home Town, The. Rupert Hughes.  
Old Lattimer's Legacy. J. S. Fletcher.  
Old Men of the Sea, The. Compton MacKenzie.  
Old Misery. Hugh Pendexter.  
Old Nick, The. F. W. Bronson.  
Old Swords. Val Gielgud.  
Old Wine. Phyllis Bottome.  
Oliver October. George Barr McCutcheon.  
Omoo. Herman Melville.  
Om; The Secret of Ahbor Valley. Talbot Mundy.  
One of the Guilty. W. L. George.  
On Special Missions. Charles Lucieto.  
On the Right Wrists. Armstrong Livingston.  
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Over the Boat-Side. Mathilde Eiker.



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Pam at Fifty. Baroness Von Hutten.  
Pandora Lifts the Lid. Christopher Morley and Don Marquis.  
Panelled Room, The. Rupert Sargent Holland.  
Paradise Bend. William Patterson White.  
Partners of the Tide. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Party of the Third Part, The. Blanche Upright.  
Passer-By, The, and Other Stories. Ethel M. Dell.  
Passionate Quest, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Passion Island. Juanita Savage.  
Passionate Rebel, A. Pamela Wynne.  
Patrol. Philip MacDonald.  
Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail, The. Ralph Connor.  
Paul Anthony, Christian. Hiram W. Haynes.  
Pawned. Frank L. Packard.  
Pawn's Count, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Pay Gravel. Hugh Pendexter.  
P. D. F. R. Inez Haynes Irwin.  
Pearl of Orr's Island, The. Harriet B. Stowe.  
Pearl Thief, The. Berta Ruck.  
Peggy By Request. Ethel M. Dell.  
Peregrine's Progress. Jeffery Farnol.  
Peter Ruff and the Double Four. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Peter Vacuum. Anthony Gibbs.  
Phantom Wires. Arthur Stringer.  
Philopena. Henry Kitchell Webster.  
Phyllis Anne. Florence Ward.  
Pig Iron. Charles G. Norris.  
Pigsties With Spires. Georgina Garry.  
Pilgrims of Adversity. William McFee.  
Pillar Mountain. Max Brand.  
Pimpernel and Rosemary. Baroness Orczy.  
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Porcelain Mask, The. John J. Chichester.

Portrait of a Spy. E. Temple Thurston.

Portygee, The. Joseph C. Lincoln.

Possession. Mazo de la Roche.

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Power. Arthur Stringer.

Power and the Glory, The. Gilbert Parker.

Power of the Hills. Laurie Yorke Erskine.

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Prairie Mother, The. Arthur Stringer.

Prairie Shrine, The. Robert J. Horton.

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Rainbow's End, The. Rex Beach.





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